What Happened to Amy?

By JANE EDWARDS

TK579

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In Loving Memory of My Grandmother,
Jane O'Brien Campbell

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06

ONE

JOYCE FARRELL smiled across the desk at Professor Thisbe. "I do appreciate your telling me about this job, sir. I'm looking forward to it."

"I think you'll find Miss Penrose a stimulating person," Oliver Thisbe said. "She has written some twenty-five books, all in the mystery field—and all best sellers. But she needs someone who can read her handwritten drafts and type them up for her. You should be able to manage that easily enough. Unless, of course, you have some ingrown aversion to cloak-and-dagger literature."

"Hardly," Joyce answered. "In fact, this job is a real godsend. Dad has to be away, and he's been fretting about what to do with me. And I don't mind admitting that the salary Miss Penrose is offering will help finance my senior year at Stanford."

"Pirate's Cove," Professor Thisbe cautioned, "is a quiet little hamlet. A few hundred people at best, and I daresay you'll find life mundane after a bit. Pinole Vista, Miss Penrose's estate, is rather isolated —no proms or football frolics."

"Well, then," said Joyce, "I shall just have to read mystery novels."

Now it was ten days after that interview, and Joyce was being treated to the most breathtaking scenery on the Monterey Peninsula. "What beautiful country!" she exclaimed, as the station wagon rounded a steeply banked curve and she leaned from its window to peer at the rocky shore line of the Pacific far below her.

Tall eucalyptus trees grew almost to the edge of the blue bay, and leaves and waves alike danced in the brisk wind and the morning sun.

"I've never seen such beautiful country!" she repeated slowly.

"Yes, missy," agreed the friendly little man who had met her at the train and identified himself as Lee Husaki, Miss Penrose's gardener. He smiled with quiet pride as if he had personally arranged every detail of the landscape and enjoyed her approval.

"Do we have much farther to go?" Joyce asked, taking her eyes reluctantly from the shimmering blues and greens to gaze at the road ahead.

"No, no. Another two, three miles. Look down there. Pirate's Cove. Miss Penrose lives up one mile from town."

The village nestled in a tiny valley. Its placid red-roofed adobe buildings looked to Joyce like a bit of old Mexico which had swept in on the tide and been stranded there. She saw no signs of life in the

narrow cobbled streets, but here and there a car or bicycle perched against a curb.

The house, when it at last appeared, was entirely in keeping with its setting. The dazzling brilliance of its white adobe walls was offset by a red-tiled roof and charming balconies, wrought iron fashioned into designs as lacy as the forest ferns.

"I don't see how Miss Penrose manages to do a scrap of work," Joyce exclaimed, alighting from the car. "If I owned anything as beautiful as this, I'd just sit back and look at it all day long."

Lee chuckled, but before he could voice a reply the massive door opened and a woman stepped out, brushing the folds from the apron which seemed to engulf her angular frame.

"Miss Farrell?" she asked, extending a hand in welcome. "I am Elizabeth Crane, Miss Penrose's housekeeper. We have been expecting you. Please come this way—Lee will see to your bags."

Joyce called a thank you to the little Japanese gardener who had chauffeured her from the station, and quickened her pace to keep up with the housekeeper's rapid gait. They passed through a cool inner court and paused at a closed door.

Miss Crane tapped perfunctorily; without waiting for a reply she entered the room. Joyce, a step behind, thought that she had never seen such chaos. The floor was awash with balled-up papers, obviously rejected by their user, and every available surface was littered with the overflow from a desk the size of a Ping-Pong table.

The woman seated at the desk bounded up with

complete disregard for the sea of pencils which cascaded from her ample lap. "My dear, I'm so glad you've come!"

"How do you do?" Joyce stammered.

"Oliver Thisbe wrote me about you—or did he telephone? No matter, you're here." Her lips quivered in amusement at the girl's dismayed glances about the room. "It's terrible, I know, an absolute turmoil at the moment. I simply cannot find anything today. If you're clever at finding things and can spell, I'm fortunate to have you. Elizabeth copes with the rest of the house, but she refuses to have anything to do with this room. Not that I blame her," she added hastily, acknowledging the forbearance in her housekeeper's gimlet eye. "Elizabeth, have we anything to eat or drink around here? This poor child looks nearly famished."

"Lemonade and sandwiches on the terrace. Ten minutes," Miss Crane announced, in a voice which clearly stated she would tolerate no tardiness. She closed the door, leaving Joyce and Millicent Penrose facing each other across the hurricane of papers.

"Blessings on Oliver for sending you," Miss Penrose chattered. "You look so young to have all the accomplishments he credits you with. He tells me you even know something about publishing."

"My father writes essays and treatises for university publications," Joyce explained. "I'm afraid I know nothing about book publishing."

"Publishers are a necessary evil, always wanting revisions and jacket photographs." Miss Penrose sighed. "Now then, I expect you'll want to freshen

up. The bathroom is through that door. Use all the towels you want."

Joyce smiled. Miss Penrose was amusing, she thought. She began to suspect that a summer in Pirate's Cove was not going to prove so dull after all.

Mindful of Miss Crane's uncompromising "ten minutes," Joyce splashed water on her face and hastily touched up her lips. With a few swoops of her hairbrush she smoothed the softly waving brown hair which reached to her shoulders, and fluffed out the sun-streaked bangs at her forehead. Three years at college had left her with no delusions about her appearance. She was attractive in a healthy, wholesome way; and if the too uptilted nose with its smattering of freckles ruled out actual beauty, she was nonetheless quite satisfied with her wide-set green eyes and trim figure.

"Quick work!" Miss Penrose said approvingly when Joyce rejoined her. "You can tell me all about yourself while we eat. We mustn't keep Elizabeth waiting. Inside she is pure velvet, but she rules with an iron hand."

Joyce found it difficult to keep her footsteps from lagging during the walk from study to terrace. The house was handsomely furnished with heavy, hand-rubbed pieces, most of which, she suspected, dated back to the previous century. The walls were hung with portraits and an occasional mirror, and she was especially struck by the beauty of the floral arrangements grouped in odd nooks and niches.

She was still sorting out her blurred impressions

when Miss Penrose stepped through a set of French doors onto a flagstone patio. The air was fragrant with the scent of jasmine. Joyce halted in astonishment as a clump of shrubbery parted and an animated gray ball of fur soared through the air, landing inches short of her feet.

"Naughty, Señor Gordo," Miss Penrose chided, stooping to lift the cat by the scruff of his neck. "Chasing butterflies again! You're too old and fat for that."

Duly chastened, the cat settled himself beneath the glass-topped table. From his throat came a low hum, more like a growl than a purr.

Joyce had not realized she was so hungry until they were seated at the generously laid table. Vintage champagne could not have rivaled the tart lemonade in flavor, and before she knew it, she had eaten several of the tasty sandwiches.

"Are you working on a book at present?" she asked, when her appetite had been appeased.

Miss Penrose nodded. "Halfway finished, as a matter of fact. I haven't quite decided on a title for it as yet. How does *Witch's Wind* strike you?"

"Shivery," Joyce admitted. "Professor Thisbe mentioned that you wrote mysteries. Is this new one to be a detective story?"

"Not exactly. More a suspense tale. I'm not terribly good at concealing the identity of my villains, so I just admit who they are at the very beginning and let my readers worry about their getting caught."

"I'm anxious to read it."

"There are three chapters already typed up. They were done before—"

"Before what?" Joyce wondered. But Miss Penrose was occupied with her hair. A few straggling tendrils of her gray upsweep had fallen loose, and she appeared to have no other concern but that of replacing them as firmly as possible. When she looked up again she made no reference to the unfinished sentence. Instead, with an abruptness which Joyce found puzzling, she changed the subject.

"I am interested to hear why you decided to come to a quiet country spot such as this," she said. "Most girls your age seem to prefer the city."

Joyce explained that her father was going on a scientific expedition out of the country and that he disapproved of her staying alone in their large old house during his absence. "My mother passed away several years ago, and since then there have been just the two of us," she added. "Besides, you were offering a most attractive salary, and summer jobs aren't too easily come by—not good ones. Dad teaches at the university, so of course my tuition is free, but there are numerous other expenses. I wouldn't feel right unless I helped out all I could."

"Most sensible of you," Miss Penrose approved. Her manner was so cordial that Joyce soon found herself chatting comfortably. Señor Gordo curved his fluffy body around her ankles; butterflies and bees flitted busily about. From the other side of the house, hidden by a scarlet bougainvillea trellis, came the energetic snapping of hedge clippers. Lee Husaki hard at work, Joyce guessed.

With a sigh of resignation the novelist pushed back her chair. "If I don't get started soon I'll never finish autographing that stack of books for the stationery store," she complained. "Oh well, if it'll help sales—"

"Is there anything I can do to help?" Joyce asked.

"No, tomorrow is time enough for you to start work. I'll try to get my notes sorted out so you can begin typing the first draft in the morning. Things have been in such a muddle for the past few weeks I've fallen dreadfully behind, and there is an August deadline to be met."

Joyce winced; she knew all about deadlines. How many times she had marched her father to his desk, urging him on with pots of coffee and freshly baked cookies, until that last page or two of manuscript came from his typewriter!

They entered the house through a side door. This time Miss Penrose led the way to a shining kitchen —a modern contrast to the rest of Pinole Vista. This was obviously Miss Crane's private domain, for the mistress of the house advanced no farther than the doorway.

"Elizabeth, show Joyce to her room, will you please?" she requested. "I won't be needing her this afternoon."

"Have you finished signing those books?" the housekeeper demanded suspiciously.

Miss Penrose shook her head. "Not yet. I'm just going to."

"Come in and sit down until I put this cake in

the oven," Miss Crane commanded. "Can't leave things half finished."

"Why don't I bring in the dishes from the terrace, now that I know where the kitchen is?" Joyce suggested. "That will save you the trouble."

Elizabeth Crane gave the girl an appraising look and seemed satisfied with what she saw. "Fine, here's a tea cart you can load them on."

Señor Gordo had vanished, no doubt in pursuit of another butterfly or Lee Husaki's good-natured company. Joyce hummed a little tune as she cleared the table and trundled the tea cart back to the kitchen. Miss Penrose might be the nominal mistress of the household, but she had an idea that it was the housekeeper who really ran Pinole Vista. It was up to Miss Crane whether Joyce's stay would be pleasant or otherwise. It would be wise, she decided, to tread very lightly the first few days.

"Do you do all the housework yourself?" she asked, as she took the dishes off the cart. "This is such a large house for one person to look after."

"A cleaning woman comes up from the village once a week," Miss Crane informed her. "Miss Millie and I don't make much of a clutter—except for her papers—and Lee has his quarters over the garage. I'll show you to your room now. You'll be expected to keep it in order yourself."

"Of course," Joyce murmured, following the woman's rigid form up the carpeted stairway. It occurred to her that Elizabeth Crane must have been born with a ramrod attached to her spine. In-

stinctively she straightened her own shoulders, resolving to pay more attention to her posture.

The housekeeper led the way to a spacious bedroom on the second floor. The furniture was gleaming old mahogany and the draperies, carpet, and bedspread were all of varying shades of blue.

"This is mine? Oh, it's lovely!" Joyce exclaimed. She crossed to the French doors and stepped out onto the little balcony. From this vantage point she had a view of the entire rear grounds. In the distance a lazy ocean lapped at the shore line, and framed far below, like an exquisite oil painting, the village of Pirate's Cove nestled in its valley.

Joyce felt a sudden impulse to throw her arms around the housekeeper's starched middle. Just in time she restrained the notion.

"I know I'm going to love it here," she beamed. "Please tell me if there is any way that I can help you."

"You were hired as Miss Millie's secretary. You're not obliged to do anything else," Elizabeth Crane stated. Then with a softening in her eyes she added:

"Miss Millie needs someone she can rely on, and it's plain to see you have your head screwed on right. I'm ashamed to say I thought at first you might be flighty, like the other girl. Glad I was wrong."

She marched out, leaving Joyce gaping in surprise.

"Well, it's nice to know I'm not considered flighty," she giggled, thankful that she had not, after all, given way to her impulse.

Her suitcases stood neatly in the corner. Joyce

laid them on the bed and began to unpack. Suddenly she paused, drawing her brows together in a puzzled frown.

"Flighty, like the other girl," Joyce echoed. "I wonder whom she was talking about?"

TWO

"I CAN'T say I envy you," Millicent Penrose apologized. "My handwriting bears a closer resemblance to Hindustani than to English. And I've never been able to compose on the typewriter."

Joyce, laden with a dozen spiral-bound notebooks, felt a surge of panic. Supposing she couldn't decipher those pencil scrawls? She would be out of a job before she had even started!

"Stop being silly," she ordered herself. "Nobody's writing could be as bad as Dad's. I'll just have to get used to it."

Miss Penrose brushed aside a wad of papers. "I hate wastebaskets," she confided. "They sit there gaping, just waiting for me to get in a muddle and fill up their nasty metal insides. Every morning I hope that I'll write straight through without any problems, but something always seems to go wrong." She brightened. "Today should be different, though. Lying awake in bed last night I got an idea for the next chapter. I know exactly what my hero should do to get himself into even worse trouble."

"But I thought the whole idea was to get him out of trouble," Joyce protested.

"Ah, but that would be too simple," Miss Penrose laughed. "No, most of the rounds must go to the villain, until everyone thinks he is sure to win. Then, at the count of nine, the hero gets up off the mat and scores a knockout."

Joyce suddenly realized that there was a great deal of thought involved in plotting a mystery novel.

"I'm more anxious than ever to get started," she said. "You mentioned yesterday that you had three chapters typed up already. May I read them first, to get an idea of what the book is like?" Joyce hoped that such a reading might also serve as a clue to Miss Penrose's thought processes in case the penciled pages were as illegible as she suspected.

Miss Penrose nodded. "You'll find them in a folder in the library. Elizabeth has set out everything for you to work with. If you have any difficulties, don't hesitate to interrupt me. Good luck!"

"I'll probably need it," Joyce thought. She carried the stack of notebooks into the next room.

A ream of yellow second sheets lay ready on the desk. A fresh ribbon was in the typewriter, and neatly arranged in the drawer were pencils and erasers, clips, and extra supplies. A metal wastebasket stood conspicuously nearby. At the sight of it Joyce's face relaxed into a grin. Apparently she was not to be allowed Miss Penrose's eccentricities. The wastebasket looked harmless enough. Maybe though, after a few days' struggle with the manuscript of *Witch's Wind*, she would come to

abhor the sight of it as much as her employer did.

Joyce located the folder in a bottom drawer. About thirty pages were clipped together, and although the first page lacked a title, she decided that this must be the beginning of the book she was to work on. Ignoring the notebooks for the moment, she took up the typed sheets and began to read. She found them highly absorbing.

Half an hour later Joyce exclaimed, "What a place to leave off! Now I'll have to decode these chicken scratches before I can read the rest of it."

She had read only a handful of mystery novels. Outside reading required for her college courses left little time to delve into lighter fiction. Now, however, Joyce decided that if her employer's previous twenty-five books were as enthralling as *Witch's Wind* she had indeed been missing something.

The suspense tale was set many years in the past, during World War II. The action thus far had taken place in a small coastal town in central California. Pirate's Cove, although wearing a fictitious name, was easily recognizable. The story seemed to revolve around a young veteran who had been wounded in the early stages of the war and discharged from the service. His adversaries were a group of saboteurs. These foreign agents were infiltrating the country through an isolated cove near the town.

Joyce rolled a sheet of paper into the typewriter and opened the top notebook. To her relief, Miss

Penrose's handwriting was not nearly so hard to read as she had anticipated. By lunchtime she had finished typing a good portion of the fourth chapter, bringing the hero into direct conflict with the enemy agents.

"I see what you mean about getting your main character into more and more hot water as he goes along," Joyce said to Miss Penrose as she seated herself at the little table on the patio. "I'm already afraid that he'll be killed by the end of the next page."

Millicent Penrose laughed. "What a nice compliment! The reader is supposed to worry, of course, but you'll be surprised at how resilient my heroes are. They have to be, to endure all I put them through."

Señor Gordo had joined them for lunch. He reached up with a dainty paw, claws sheathed, and tucked away the morsels handed down to him, as though he were merely eating to be polite. Lee Husaki, Joyce had learned, took his meals in the kitchen with Miss Crane.

"Elizabeth thinks it wouldn't be proper for her to eat with me," Miss Penrose had explained with a little smile at dinner the evening before.

Joyce was reminded of a question she had wanted to ask. "Miss Crane seems to be a very accomplished person," she said. "Did she type those first chapters for you? They were beautifully done."

"Oh no, Elizabeth doesn't type. Amy did those before she left."

Could Amy, Joyce wondered, be the girl whom

the housekeeper had described as "flighty"? She made a hesitant query.

"Amy Dekker was a dear girl, but for some reason she and Elizabeth didn't get along," Miss Penrose said. "I suppose her running off like that convinced Elizabeth that most young people aren't to be trusted. It *was* rather vexing, in the middle of the book and all. Still, I'm not so sure I wouldn't have done the same thing in her place."

"Curiouser and curiouser," Joyce quoted mentally, more bewildered than informed by her employer's remarks.

"If only she had let me know," Millicent Penrose went on. "I would have been delighted to give her a church wedding, with all the trimmings. I suppose, though, that Amy decided an elopement was more romantic. No family of her own to insist otherwise."

"Not so curious after all," Joyce thought, feeling vaguely let down. Had she expected a real-life mystery as well as the fictional one contained within the pages of the unfinished manuscript? If so, she answered her own question, the expectation had been brought up short by Miss Penrose's rambling statement. There was nothing odd about an orphaned secretary eloping. Such things happened every day.

"Did she marry a boy from Pirate's Cove?" she asked.

Miss Penrose offered a bit of chicken to Señor Gordo. The cat sniffed at it and turned away. His expression conveyed disdain. Chicken, when he had been expecting tunafish!

"That's the thing I don't understand," the older woman said. "I don't know whom she married. She sent a note for her luggage and never bothered to write me again. It was really very trying."

"I can imagine," Joyce murmured. She found that she wasn't especially interested in Amy Dekker after all. She was much more concerned about the fictional characters of *Witch's Wind.*

As Miss Penrose had hinted, her hero proved to be resourceful beyond imagination. He made a timely escape from a diabolical trap, and by the middle of Chapter V had managed to involve himself in an even more harrowing situation. Joyce was actually annoyed when the novelist prevented her from typing more about his exploits.

"I need to know something about seaplanes," Millicent Penrose interrupted, poking her head through the door. "I don't suppose you could describe one in detail for me, could you?"

Joyce admitted that she could not.

"Drat! It was going so well, too. I'm sorry, my dear, but you will have to run into town. They have an excellent library there, with all sorts of technical books. Zinnia Fisher will help you find what you need. It must be a seaplane circa 1943. Such details are quite irrelevant to the plot, but I'm sure to get letters from my readers if I don't have everything just right."

"I'll see what I can find," Joyce promised, hoping the librarian knew more about research than she did. "Shall I walk down or take the car?"

"Oh dear, you can't." Miss Penrose tugged at her

ear, loosening a stray lock. "Lee drove Elizabeth over to Ashville, and I won't have you walking in this hot sun. I suppose it will have to wait until they get back. Unless," she added hopefully, "you ride a bicycle. Do you? There is one in the garage, if it hasn't a flat tire."

Joyce assured her employer that she could ride a bicycle, and went at once to search for it. She found it wedged behind a wheelbarrow, paintless and dented, but the tires responded satisfactorily to her tentative prods. It would do, she decided.

"This is what you were hired for, my girl," she reminded herself sternly. "Much better to be an errand girl than a doughnut slinger in a coffee shop. At least you're getting some exercise!"

She pushed off, with a library card tucked in her pocket and a beach coolie hat tied under her chin. The road sloped gently downward most of the way, and her good spirts soon revived at the rush of air against her face.

Pirate's Cove scarcely merited the name "town" —"village" was more accurate. Twenty or thirty houses cuddled cozily around the two-block main street, while an even fewer number of dwellings perched haughtily on garden-studded hills.

Joyce had no difficulty in finding the library. It was a square building in the exact center of the village, flanked by the post office on one side and a twin-spired church on the other. Inside its thick adobe walls a delicious coolness pervaded the air. Joyce removed her coolie hat and glanced curiously around. There appeared to be no one in attendance.

"Hello?" she called, in a voice which to her ears seemed to boom loudly through the silence of its surroundings.

"Hello, hello," echoed another voice, distinctly masculine in tone.

Joyce pivoted. The reply had come from behind a towering stack of books on a corner table. The leather-bound tomes effectively hid the owner of the voice, but a pair of khaki-clad legs, ending in moccasined feet, could be seen extending beneath the table.

"I'm looking for—" What was the name Miss Penrose had mentioned? Some sort of flower. Rose? Marigold? Azalea? Petunia? Joyce sighed. "I'm looking for the librarian," she substituted lamely.

"Zinnia's out. I'm holding the fort," came the exasperated reply. "Be there in a sec."

Zinnia Fisher. How could she ever have forgotten a name like that? Joyce waited a minute or two, then walked quietly over to the table. From behind the books came the sound of a pen scratching across a tablet. Unable to resist the temptation, she raised herself on tiptoe and peered over the barricade.

The owner of the voice had dark-brown hair which seemed to have recently undergone a good deal of mussing. Even as she watched, he finished a last, furiously paced sentence and mussed his hair again, obviously in irritation. A male Miss Penrose, thought Joyce, stifling a giggle.

The muffled sound brought his head jerking up. His eyes were also dark brown, and they looked so astonished that Joyce had the grace to blush.

"Peeping Thomasina, I presume?" the young man inquired.

"I'm so sorry," Joyce gulped. "That was terribly rude of me. Shall I go back and come in again?"

"It's much too late for that. Clinton may get together with Howe after all. You've interrupted Marion's delaying maneuvers. How do you expect George to win the war if people keep popping up on top of the Green Mountain Boys?"

Joyce retreated a step or two, eyeing him in astonishment. "Are you writing a book?" she asked, at last.

"Thesis. American history. Why the British didn't win the Revolutionary War, when they had everything on their side."

"Why didn't they?" Joyce was fascinated by his cryptic conversation.

"Because Clinton never got together with Howe," he said, as if that explained everything.

Maybe it did, but being an anthropology major she hadn't studied American history since her freshman year and was a little foggy on the finer points of the Revolution. Since she couldn't discuss American history on equal terms, she hurriedly changed the subject. "Will Miss Fisher be back soon?" she asked.

"Hard telling. She went to the beauty shop, and that's liable to be an all-day project. I'm in charge, being steadfast, brave, and loyal—besides which I live here. You *are* looking for a book, aren't you? Which one?"

"I have no idea," said Joyce. "Do you know any-

thing about a seaplane, circa 1943? I've got to have a description of one."

"Good grief! Do you write books?"

"No, Miss Penrose does, and she wants this right away because she's bogged down in the middle of a chapter."

"Oh, you must be the new secretary. Zinnia got word of you on the grapevine and passed it along to me—as if I didn't have enough to worry about. Glad to know you. I'm Barry Randolph."

"I'm Joyce Farrell. And you don't have to worry about me at all. Just show me where I can find out something about that blasted seaplane so I can go back to work."

"*Touché!*" He lifted an amused eyebrow and grinned engagingly. "Shall we start over and suspend hostilities? I'm willing to forgive and forget if you are."

Joyce, who fancied herself the injured party, wondered just what it was he was willing to forgive, but decided that if she broached the subject she might never wade out of the morass into which attempted conversation with Barry Randolph seemed to lead. She nodded in agreement.

"Okay, then, I think the airplane books are over here." He untangled his long legs and strode to a dusty shelf marked 629.1 Aeronautics. "Here we are, Aircraft. From Wilbur and Orville to the Sabre jet. 629.12, 629.13 Seaplanes. Let's try this book. Aha! a flying boat, complete with pontoons. One picture worth at least a thousand words. Speed this post-

haste to Pirate's Cove's most distinguished novelist, and I guarantee she'll give you a raise."

"Yes, but is it 1943?" Joyce asked dubiously.

"Why?"

"Because if it's not she'll get letters by the dozen from her faithful readers pointing out the discrepancy."

"Can't have that." He ran his finger down the text, stopping triumphantly at a mention of seaplanes used during World War II. "Mission accomplished!"

"Thank you very much," Joyce said, making a mental note of the page number. "Can you check this out for me?"

"Reference book. Not supposed to, but I'll stretch a point and cover with Zinnia for you. She's a grand old girl."

"She must be if she lets you live here."

He looked at her blankly. "Live here? Oh, I did say that, didn't I? Well, I do, practically. Hey! When will I see you again?"

"When I return the amphibian. Give my regards to Clinton and Howe," said Joyce. She marched down the library steps, clamped the coolie hat on her head, and bicycled out of Pirate's Cove. And Professor Thisbe had warned her to expect a dull summer!

Miss Penrose was delighted with the book, saying the description was exactly what she required. "I'm surprised Zinnia let you have this," she observed. "She treats those reference books as if they were her

own personal property instead of something we all pay taxes for. Did you have any trouble with her?"

"Actually, I didn't even see Miss Fisher," Joyce confessed. "A lunatic named Barry Randolph found the book for me. He said something about living at the library."

"Oh, Barry! He usually says the first thing that pops into his head," said Miss Penrose. "Really, he's quite an intelligent boy. His parents live in San Francisco, but he is spending the summer with his aunt in the village. Told her he needed peace and quiet to work on his thesis. I gather he has taken out squatters' rights at the library."

Since there remained less than an hour before dinner, Miss Penrose suggested that further work on the manuscript be suspended until the following day. Dusty and hot from her ride, Joyce used the time to take a bath. She found it difficult to keep her thoughts away from the unique young man who "lived" at the library. Even in her wide acquaintance at college she had never met anyone who made such audacious statements in such an offhand manner. And, she acknowledged, aside from his intriguing personality he was certainly good-looking.

Miss Penrose had an engagement that evening, so after dinner Joyce was left to her own devices. She wandered into the kitchen and picked up a dish towel.

"You don't have to do that," Miss Crane said.

"At home I'd have to wash *and* dry," Joyce pointed out. "Not to mention cook supper to begin

with. Before the summer is over I'd like you to show me how you prepared the veal scallopini. It was heavenly!"

"'Tisn't hard. The main thing to remember is not to overcook it." The housekeeper launched into a step-by-step explanation of the recipe, to which Joyce listened attentively. When the kitchen was tidied, they carried their coffee out onto the patio. The conversation eventually turned to books, and Miss Crane confessed that she was an avid mystery fan.

"I can't wait to see how *Witch's Wind* turns out," Joyce said. "It's such a gripping story. I think that if I were Amy Dekker I would have postponed my elopement until the book was finished."

The housekeeper sniffed. "No stability, that girl," she said. "Always out somewhere—flitting here, flitting there."

"How long did she work for Miss Penrose?"

"'Bout a year, more or less. Miss Millie just couldn't believe it when Amy up and left her flat —almost a month and not even a postcard from her since. Seemed peculiar to me too, though I must say I didn't especially cotton to her."

"Peculiar?" Joyce asked curiously. "You mean about her getting married?"

"Not that, exactly." Miss Crane looked disturbed at the recollection. "She was a pretty little thing. Always talking. Land sakes, how that girl could talk! Between her and Miss Millie . . . No, I'm not surprised that she got married. The strange thing is, I'm not so sure that she wanted to. The last few

nights before she left I used to hear her crying in her room."

"How very odd!"

"Hardly seems the way a bride would act. Then, too, she never said anything to us about her young man. Now that wasn't natural, not for Amy anyway. I've often wondered if maybe—"

"Maybe what, Miss Crane?" Joyce prodded.

"If maybe somebody made her go!"

THREE

JOYCE went faithfully through her nightly routine —hair brushing, face cleansing, and the like—only to find that, once in bed, she was more wide awake than ever. Moonlight filtered in through cracks in the Venetian blinds and from beneath the curtains veiling the French doors. The pleasant room looked subtly altered, filled as it was with shadows.

"I wonder if this is where Amy Dekker slept?" Joyce mused. "No one could help being happy here. What could have made her run off without saying a word to anyone? People just don't do things like that."

The irrefutable fact remained that this was precisely what Amy had done. "A pretty little thing," Miss Crane had called her. Well, pretty girls usually did get married sooner or later. And if Amy was romantically inclined, she might easily have been persuaded into an elopement and a hideaway honeymoon. But even the most romantic honeymoon seldom lasted more than a month. Why hadn't Amy written or called Miss Penrose?

Joyce sighed and settled back into the pillows, telling herself that she must get to sleep if she was to cope with the vagaries of Miss Penrose's handwriting in the morning. Sleep, however, eluded her.

Had Amy done something very wrong? The girl might have found herself in financial straits and made off with a royalty check or the grocery money. That was a possible explanation for the sobs Miss Crane had overheard. Or was it? The housekeeper was a shrewd woman. Very little escaped her observation. If Amy Dekker had been a thief, the chances were a thousand to one that Elizabeth Crane would have known about it.

"This is getting me nowhere," Joyce groaned.

She flipped over on her stomach and began to recite the litany of American Presidents. Barry Randolph would have been surprised at her choice of a sleep inducer. Somewhere around Warren G. Harding drowsiness overcame her, and she slept peacefully until morning with no further speculation on the enigma of Amy Dekker.

Work on the manuscript of *Witch's Wind* progressed, by turns hectically and smoothly. Between stints at the typewriter, when Miss Penrose locked herself in the study to struggle in paper-crushing isolation with her literary problems, Joyce filled her time with reading and hikes through the hilly countryside. She learned a great deal about flower cultivation from Lee, and occasionally Miss Crane, who had asked Joyce to call her Elizabeth, found the leisure to give her a cooking lesson.

A week after her first trip to the library, Miss

Penrose asked Joyce to return the book before, as she put it, Zinnia broke down the door demanding the volume.

"Take as much time as you like," the novelist said kindly. "I won't be needing you again this afternoon."

Joyce cycled down the winding path in a far more expectant frame of mind than on her previous ride. She was anxious to explore the village shops, not having had an opportunity to do so before and eager to meet the legendary Zinnia Fisher. Also, she was not averse to the idea of seeing Barry Randolph again.

She paused a moment at the library steps and brushed a few lingering specks of dust from her lime-green pedal-pusher set. The outfit was attractive, complimenting as it did the darker green of her eyes. She stole a peek in her tiny purse mirror. Yes, her face was clean, her lipstick on straight. But—she sighed—something would have to be done about the blush which appeared every time she found herself thinking about Barry Randolph. She decided to solve the problem by ignoring him entirely.

A prim little lady with a delicate skin and snow-white curls sat behind the charging desk, busily sorting cards. She smelled of lavender sachet.

"Good afternoon," said Joyce. "Miss Millicent Penrose asked me to return this book."

"High time," said Miss Fisher, and her voice was crisp, but not unkind. "Reference books belong in the library." She flipped through the pages of the

volume and then laid it aside. "You'd be the new secretary. Miss Farrell, isn't it?"

"Yes, I'm Joyce Farrell." Joyce found her eyes straying to the nearby table. It was still stacked with books, but no khaki legs protruded beneath its sturdy frame. She turned again to Miss Fisher.

"Be sure to remind Millicent about tomorrow night," the librarian was saying. "It's her turn. And we want to start promptly at seven thirty."

"I'll do that," answered Joyce, wondering what on earth was supposed to take place the following night. It seemed that everyone in Pirate's Cove talked in a sort of local code.

"She didn't come last time," Miss Fisher said rather tartly. "Tell her I'm not prepared to fill in again. Pickles and olives."

"I beg your pardon?"

But Miss Fisher had turned away to help a fat woman unload half a dozen books from a huge shopping bag.

Completely bewildered, Joyce retreated through the door and walked straight into Barry Randolph.

"Whew!" he gasped, regaining his balance. "All our meetings seem to be on the cataclysmic side."

"Excuse me," Joyce giggled. "I just met Miss Fisher, and she says I'm supposed to remind Miss Penrose to be somewhere at seven thirty tomorrow night. Have you any idea what 'pickles and olives' mean?"

"Well, just as a guess I'd say that's what your boss is supposed to bring to the club supper. I can ask my Aunt Luella, if you want me to. She's sort

of the guiding light of the Pirate's Cove Cultural Society."

Joyce smiled with relief. "I'm sure Elizabeth will know what to do," she said. "What kind of culture does the Society specialize in?"

"You name it," said Barry, spreading his hand expansively. "Aunt Luella dabbles in poetry; Harriet Wilks composes sonatas, when she isn't reading other people's postcards; and you haven't lived until you've seen Zinnia's pastels."

"I can imagine," said Joyce. "A sort of do-it-yourself society."

"Precisely. Are you going to be there?"

"At the meeting? Why, I don't know. I suppose so, if Miss Penrose asks me to come."

"I'll invite you now, to save her the trouble. Mustn't miss it. Highlight of the month in Pirate's Cove." For just an instant Barry dropped his flip attitude. "Please come. I haven't called you because—" He gestured eloquently at the inner room.

"I know. Clinton and Howe."

"It's awfully important to me. I'm trying to cram a year's work into three months. If I finish the thesis by September I'll get my master's degree and, I hope, a good teaching job."

Joyce was amazed. She could picture Barry as almost anything but a teacher. She tried to visualize him lecturing to a class, but the idea seemed incongruous.

He read her mind. "You don't think I'm the type?"

"Well, I—I suppose—that is, I hardly know you," Joyce stammered.

"Have to remedy that situation. As a matter of fact," said Barry, his brown eyes unaccountably serious, "I think that by the time the summer is over you'll know me very well indeed."

Joyce pedaled home in a daze. She had ridden halfway back to Pinole Vista before she remembered that she had not, after all, seen anything more of Pirate's Cove!

Miss Penrose had been occupied with a more than usually difficult scene. "Pickles and olives," she fretted, when Joyce delivered the librarian's message. "I would have sworn Luella said coleslaw. Or was it macaroni salad?"

"Pickles and olives," Joyce repeated firmly. "Miss Fisher was very specific. She also asked that you be there at seven thirty."

"All right, tell Elizabeth," Miss Penrose sighed. "It's Zinnia's turn to speak about her pastels, if I remember rightly."

Joyce took a deep breath. "Miss Fisher said something about it's being your turn," she answered. "I didn't understand her."

"My turn? Oh no! I spoke last month. A very nice talk it was, too, all about—" A horrified glaze clouded her eyes. "Oh, my sainted aunt! I didn't either. That was the week my agent kept telephoning from New York, and Amy left, and Elizabeth's sister was ill. Everything was in such an uproar I faked laryngitis and took to my bed. It *is* my turn. Oh dear! What am I going to talk about?"

"Why don't you tell them about your new book?"

Joyce suggested. "You could read a chapter or so, and I'm sure they'd love to hear it."

Miss Penrose's spirits took an upward swing. "I could, couldn't I? That's a fine idea. Run along now and tell Elizabeth about the coleslaw."

"Pickles and olives," Joyce said, under her breath, and fled.

"Pickles and olives," Elizabeth nodded, a few moments later. "Mrs. Norris telephoned. She thought Miss Millie might need reminding."

"Do you belong to the Cultural Society too?" Joyce asked.

"Ha!" Elizabeth snorted. "Saints forbid. I'm too busy with my kitchen."

It seemed to Joyce that she had no sooner begun to dress than it was time to leave. She gave the full-length mirror a final chance to point out any flaws in her appearance and, when it failed to do so, smiled happily. She did look nice. A shampoo had left her hair sparkling with golden highlights. The full-skirted cotton dress with its matching sweater clung to her slender waist and emphasized her newly acquired tan. Twisting around to straighten her seams, she blessed the whim which had led her to spend her Dad's birthday gift on a pair of stiletto-heeled, blue-linen pumps.

"Joyce!" Miss Penrose cried, from the foot of the stairs. "What have you done with my notes?"

"They're on the desk," she called back. "I'm coming."

Miss Penrose had insisted that Joyce accompany her to the club meeting, saying that she needed all the moral support she could get. And Joyce was happy that things had worked out in this way. Although Barry Randolph had invited her, she felt that she would be much less conspicuous in the guise of a secretary assisting her employer.

"He mightn't even be there," she told herself, unconvincingly. But she didn't think she had mistaken the earnestness of his tone the previous afternoon. Unless, of course, it was a well-rehearsed line. Time would tell.

The Pirate's Cove Cultural Society had its headquarters at Luella Norris' home. It was a stately house, though neither as large nor as beautiful as Pinole Vista, set on a knoll overlooking the village.

Lee swept them out of the car with a flourish of his cap, evidently enjoying his promotion to chauffeur for the occasion. "You be back for us not a minute later than eleven," Miss Penrose instructed him, seconds before a stout girl in a maid's uniform admitted them to the house.

Ten or twelve women had arranged themselves around the modern living room. They greeted Miss Penrose effusively, and cast penetrating glances at Joyce. Mrs. Norris performed the introductions in a highly efficient manner. "Mrs. Wilks, our postmistress, Miss Hale, Mrs. Young . . ."

Lost in a sea of strange names, Joyce smilled. She was certain that she wouldn't remember one of them by the end of the evening.

"Let's get down to business, ladies," Mrs. Norris

commanded. She was a large, jolly woman with a clarion voice. "Millicent is going to give us a little talk, but before she does I think our treasurer would—"

"Bet you thought I'd taken to the hills," Barry said in an undertone, appearing at her side with a try of hors d'oeuvres.

Joyce's smile brightened. "Hi! I was feeling a little outnumbered."

"Buck up and have an olive," he whispered. "Help is on the way. As soon as your boss goes into her spiel we can bolt for shelter."

"Oh, she'll be hurt if I don't stay," Joyce demurred. "She's awfully jittery as it is. I can't desert her now."

"Then we'll suffer together. I'll deal out these goodies and be right back."

Barry seemed intent on acting the role of the perfect host. He moved away, with a gag for each woman as he offered the food. In his light summer suit, he looked even handsomer and more interesting, Joyce thought. He was the only male in the roomful of women. Glancing around, she wondered if there was a Mr. Norris lurking somewhere in the background. Later she asked Barry and he said, "Sure, but Uncle Elwood takes advantage of club night and goes out with some of the boys."

From her chair at the far end of the room Joyce had a perfect view of the assembled clubwomen. Most of the ladies, like Miss Penrose and Mrs. Norris, were in early middle age, but there was a sprinkling of quite elderly women as well. Only

one of the guests, a beautiful blond girl seated near the piano, was close to her own age. Joyce felt a twinge of envy as Barry bent down to exchange pleasantries with her.

The blonde smiled, showing dazzlingly white teeth against her even tan. Her name, Joyce recalled, was Iris Hale.

"I wonder what she's doing in a place like Pirate's Cove. She ought to be in Atlantic City, winning beauty contests," Joyce thought.

Miss Penrose took her place on the small removable stage, cleared her throat once or twice, and began to speak. Although nervous at first, her poise returned as she launched into a description of *Witch's Wind.* After a short summary of the plot, she reached for the uncompleted manuscript, announcing that she would read the first chapter.

"She writes well," Barry said approvingly, returning with the empty tray.

"Yes, and she is fun to work with. I really do enjoy my job," Joyce whispered back.

A polite burst of applause greeted the end of the chapter.

"*Most* delightful, Millicent," Mrs. Norris congratulated the speaker.

"I should say so." Iris Hale added her voice to the chorus. "What a clever plot! I'd be fascinated to learn where you get your ideas."

"I don't even know myself," Miss Penrose disclaimed. "Mostly, I suppose, they just pop into my head."

The program concluded, Barry heaped a pair of

plates at the buffet and managed to find a quiet spot on the terrace for Joyce and himself.

"Would you like to go on a picnic tomorrow?" he asked. "I'll even supply the food. There's bound to be plenty of this stuff left over."

"What an invitation!" Joyce laughed. "It sounds like a lovely idea, though. I hope Miss Penrose won't object."

"How about two o'clock? I'll ride my bike up to your place, and we can decide then where to go."

"Fine," Joyce agreed.

The hours seemed to dissolve into minutes. When Joyce next looked at her wrist watch, she was amazed to find that it was past ten thirty. She decided that her lipstick could probably stand freshening.

Someone told her that the powder room was upstairs, two doors to the right. A few of the guests were already leaving when Joyce collected her purse from the living room and went upstairs. She made repairs hastily, not wishing to keep Miss Penrose waiting, and she had just left the marble-tiled room when an uncomfortably familiar sensation tickled her ankle.

"Oh, good night!" Joyce exclaimed in disgust. "I've got a run!"

She bent down to inspect the damage. As she did so, she became aware of a woman's voice close by. She had noticed on her way up that the room at the head of the stairs was a den of sorts, but now the door was partially closed and she was unable to see the person who spoke. Vexed at the

nylon strands which had given way, she paid little heed to the low-voiced words; however, she got the impression that the conversation was rather one-sided, and deducted that someone must be using the telephone.

Barry had resumed his role of host and was assisting Miss Penrose into her jacket when Joyce came back. Zinnia Fisher stood nearby, putting on her white straw hat and bickering amiably with Harriet Wilks.

"Don't forget tomorrow," Barry cautioned. "Two o'clock."

"I'll be ready," Joyce assured him.

During the drive home Miss Penrose sighed volubly and handed the typewritten pages back to her secretary. "I'm glad that's over," she confessed. "Thank heaven I don't have to go through it more than twice a year!"

"You did beautifully," Joyce said. "Everyone was very much interested in the book. Just think of all the sales your talk will promote. After hearing the first chapter, they will be dying to read the rest of it."

"They'll wait until Zinnia gets it in the library," Miss Penrose predicted, "so they can read it free."

Joyce dropped the folder on her desk and fairly waltzed up the stairs. It had been a lovely, lovely evening. And tomorrow promised to be even better. Before drawing the drapes, she walked out on her bedroom balcony. A million stars dotted the black velvet sky, boding fair weather to come. With a happy sigh, Joyce went to bed.

She couldn't imagine, at first, what had awakened her. Squinting at the luminous clock, whose hands pointed to the hour of three, she decided that a dry throat was the cause, but she lay debating for some minutes with herself before pulling on her robe. A glass of milk would lull her back to sleep.

Not until she reached the foot of the stairs did she experience her first surge of alarm. Then it fell over her like a cloak, affecting eyes and ears and nose simultaneously. Something was wrong—dreadfully wrong—Joyce's sharply alerted senses told her.

The air was full of smoke, and she saw a flicker of ghostly light under the closed door of the library. After a second, she gripped the doorknob and flung it open.

The room was ablaze!

FOUR

FANTASTIC patterns of flame-etched shadows rippled across the walls. The bookshelves were illuminated with an eerie light, as iridescent fire tongues crept steadily toward the rows of volumes. Her desk, at the near end of the room, was almost totally consumed by flames except for a shimmering pool at one edge where a vase had shattered, spewing water and petals alike over the parched wooden surface.

All this Joyce took in with one incredulous glance. Then, as horror prodded her into action, she darted out of the room, slamming the door on the inferno. She knew later that she must have screamed without realizing she had done so, for the next instant Elizabeth and Miss Penrose appeared at the top of the stairs.

"Fire! In the library!" Joyce heard her voice rising above the crackle of the flames.

Without waiting to see the effect of her words, she raced into the kitchen. Her trembling fingers

tore at the cabinet and wrestled the dishpan off its hook. Water thundered from both taps, soaking her skin and night clothes, but she managed to steady the pan until it was full. The return journey seemed interminable; water slopped over the brim, and her arms ached from the unaccustomed burden.

Miss Penrose's usual air of vague helplessness had completely vanished. "That's no use," she said briskly, taking the dishpan away from Joyce and setting it on a nearby chair. "Elizabeth is fetching the fire extinguisher, and I've phoned for help. Get Lee, quickly. Have him bring the hose around to the window."

Heedless of her dripping clothes, Joyce ran into the yard and around to the garage. Lee met her at the driveway, his eyes heavy with sleep. He had been awakened by the uproar and was on his way to investigate when Joyce careened up to him. Her words acted like a dash of cold water. Instantly he darted back into the garage and emerged seconds later with a coiled hose under his arm.

"Have to break a window," Joyce gasped.

Lee nodded. He wasted no time on words, but unrolled the hose as they sped back to the house. Joyce grabbed the nozzle, while he stooped to attach the other end to the faucet. A few quick steps brought her around to the library window. Grayish-white smoke was seeping out at the bottom of the pane. She poked the metal spout through the window, and felt the hose leap under her fingers as water pulsed through it and into the blazing room.

After a moment, Lee tore the hose from her trembling hands. She stood aside and watched the spray contend with the devouring flames. Her knees felt much too weak to sustain her weight; her whole body shuddered. Grimly determined not to faint, Joyce gripped the wall and forced herself into a semblance of calm.

Gradually the fire sputtered out. The combined efforts of water and foam from the fire extinguisher overcame the blaze just as a new sound was heard —the banshee wail of a siren. The fire department had finally arrived.

"I reckon it's safe for you to go in now," Calvin Wilks said, forty-five minutes later. He and three other members of the Pirate's Cove Volunteer Fire Department had arrived at Pinole Vista to find the blaze already subdued, but they had insisted on carrying out several precautions of their own to ensure that no embers still smoldered in some forgotten corner.

Joyce felt like averting her face from the blackened shell of the library. The priceless Oriental rug had been totally destroyed, as had the curtains, carefully preserved from another century. Most of the furniture was reduced to springs and frames, with tattered bits of upholstery still clinging pathetically to them.

"What a shambles!" she moaned, with a catch in her voice.

Elizabeth placed a consoling arm about her

shoulders. "If it hadn't been for you, the whole place might have burned," she said.

Miss Penrose stood at the door, staring hollow-eyed at the desolate ruins of her beautiful possessions.

"My grandfather brought those vases around the Horn in the 1840's," she murmured brokenly. "All the way, and all these years, and not a chip in them. Now they're gone."

"Most of the books were saved," Joyce observed, trying desperately to cheer her up. "And that portrait of your grandfather will be as good as new after it has been cleaned."

The firemen sloshed about the room, piling chunks of debris in one corner.

"The blaze seems to have started over here near the desk," Calvin Wilks said. "I've seen it happen time and again—someone goes off and leaves a cigarette burning. Next thing you know—poof! You ladies ought to be more careful."

Joyce and Miss Penrose exchanged startled glances.

"Poppycock!" the novelist snorted, snapped out of her trance by his implied accusation. "None of us smokes—not even Lee, who is seldom in this part of the house. It wasn't a cigarette that started this fire!"

Mr. Wilks shrugged. "Can't think of any other explanation," he said mulishly. "Maybe the young lady here knows you disapprove of the weed and was taking a few puffs in private."

"That's not true!" Joyce cried. "I didn't—honestly I didn't."

Elizabeth intervened. "Of course you didn't. Now you listen to me, Cal Wilks! Something or someone set off a fire here tonight, but it wasn't one of us. You'd better keep looking until you find the right answer!"

But there was apparently no answer to be found. The men sifted conscientiously through the rubble without finding a trace of the thing which had triggered the conflagration. Finally they left, tired and sooty, after cautioning the householders to remove the charred furniture as quickly as possible to avoid a repetition of the flare-up. Calvin Wilks was the last one to go.

"Oh well," he said as he was leaving, "I suppose you'll phone the insurance investigators and have them here first thing in the morning. They're experts, and they'll find the cause of it."

Miss Penrose shook her head soberly. "No, Calvin," she said. "It was foolish, of course, but I let the policies lapse after I had that quarrel with their agent last year. I meant to renew them, but after all, I've carried insurance for years and nothing ever seemed to burn—no, I'm afraid I won't be reimbursed for my losses, and we'll see no investigators."

After the men had gone, the women sat in the kitchen sipping hot chocolate and talking over the disaster.

"I'm sure nothing was wrong when we came home," said Joyce. "I even went into the library for

a moment to put the manuscript back on my desk. I'm sure I would have noticed—"

She broke off in horrified recollection. *"Witch's Wind!* It must have burned too!"

Before anyone could stop her, she dashed back into the library. But there were only indistinguishable cinders and blackened chunks of wood where her desk had been. The typewritter, twisted into an unrecognizable blob of metal and plastic by the searing heat, was the only tangible reminder of the hours she had spent on the manuscript.

"It's all right—really, dear, it's all right," Millicent Penrose choked, blinking back her tears. "I can start it again, or do another book."

"But it was so good!" Joyce was sobbing now. "It was such a wonderful story, and it might be my fault that it's gone. I can't see how. I just don't know what I might have done to start the fire, but—"

"Joyce!" Miss Penrose grasped the girl by the shoulders. "None of us believes for one minute that you are responsible for this, this—" She faltered, unable to find words to describe the ghastly aftermath of the fire. "I will not have you blaming yourself. That will accomplish nothing. Now come back to the kitchen and drink your cocoa."

Immeasurably grateful for the novelist's expressions of confidence, Joyce obeyed. After a few minutes she had regained enough composure to describe how she had awakened, feeling thirsty, and decided to go downstairs for a glass of milk, thus discovering the blaze.

"We owe you our lives," Elizabeth remarked

solemnly. "Let's all be grateful that it was no worse."

A few gray wisps of dawn were streaking the sky when Lee returned to his apartment over the garage and the three women straggled back to their bedrooms. Joyce was appalled at the sight her mirror reflected. Her robe and pajamas were speckled with grime, and her face was streaked with black. She tiptoed into the bathroom, turning the shower on slowly so the running water would not disturb the others.

"Boy, what a mess!" she grimaced.

Her hair was caked with cinders, and as she reached up to brush them off, a sliver of glass tinkled to the floor. Joyce stared thoughtfully at it. It reminded her of something—something she felt she ought to remember. But her fatigued brain was barely functioning, and the elusive recollection vanished completely.

Clean, and clad in fresh pajamas, Joyce tumbled into bed. She expected to have no trouble in returning to sleep. Much to her annoyance, however, her former drowsiness seemed to have been washed down the drain along with the soot and cinders.

"Too much excitement, I suppose," she murmurerd as her thoughts rambled on. For some reason Joyce found herself thinking of the conversation she had overheard right after the Cultural Society meeting. She wondered who had been in the den using the telephone. She remembered pausing beside the door to examine her ruined

stocking and hearing snatches of a one-way conversation.

Although she had no intention of eavesdropping, and indeed had hardly listened at the time, a few of the woman's words had been retained in her mind. "The girl must have told her something . . . I don't like it a bit . . . not safe . . . better get rid of it . . ."

The fragmentary sentences didn't make much sense as Joyce mulled them over now. She could not guess who the person speaking had been, since at approximately that time there was a general exodus of clubwomen from the house.

Joyce shifted her position and tried to think of more pleasant matters. The party tonight—last night, she amended, as the dawn's half-light grew stronger outside the window—had been more fun than she had expected. Everything connected with Barry Randolph seemed to be fun, even an evening with the ladies of the Pirate's Cove Cultural Society. She smiled, feeling the built-up tension in her muscles begin to relax.

A particularly aggressive sunbeam sparkled its way beneath the flapping Venetian blind, bounced against the mirror, and woke Joyce. The flash of light upon the bright surface reminded her of the sliver of glass which had fallen from her hair. There in the bathroom, before she went to bed, it had almost seemed a clue to something important. Glass. A splinter of glass from a heavy pane. Why should she recall that the first thing on waking?

Joyce sighed in frustration and burrowed back into the pillows. A second later the sunbeam glistened again. The little yellow glow lit up a dim corner of her subsconscious. She sat bolt upright.

"Of course!" she exclaimed. "Smoke was already coming through the window when Lee and I got there with the hose. The window must have been broken before we got there!"

FIVE

"ARE you very sure about that broken window?" Miss Penrose demanded.

Joyce nodded. "Positive. Just then it didn't make any impression on me, but this morning I could see it as clearly as anything. At that time I was frantic to break an opening in the window for the hose. After that, things happened so quickly I didn't have time to think."

The novelist clasped her hands behind her back. "If you can, I want you to describe exactly what you saw. It could be very important. Try to remember how the window looked before you smashed it."

Closing her eyes, Joyce forced her memory back over the route she had traveled from the garage. It was amazing how vividly the scene returned.

"We were running. Lee had the hose, and he was a couple of feet ahead of me when we reached the outdoor tap by the camellia bed," she recalled. "Most of the length was uncoiled by the time we got there. Lee knelt down and began to screw the

hose onto the faucet. I grabbed the nozzle end and ran around to the window, thinking that the heavy spout would break the glass if I struck it hard enough."

Elizabeth and Miss Penrose were watching her intently, taking in every word.

"I could see the flames. There was a lot of noise," Joyce continued. "I pulled back my arm to throw the hose. Smoke was already oozing through a little square near the bottom of the window. There was a bit of white fabric or paper on the pane—just a scrap. I covered my eyes, threw the hose forward, and felt the water rush through. Then Lee grabbed it away from me and knocked out the rest of the glass so he wouldn't cut himself."

"A little square near the bottom of the window," Miss Penrose repeated significantly. "Where at the bottom?"

"On the left-hand side looking in."

Miss Penrose nodded, as though this confirmed what she had already suspected. "I want to take a look at that window," she said. "Come outside with me."

Joyce and Elizabeth had to hurry to keep up with their employer's rapid strides. The novelist halted before the gaping hole where the window had been.

"Show me where the smoke was coming through," she said. "Careful! Don't cut yourself."

Joyce gestured at the lower left-hand corner of the frame.

Cautiously avoiding the jagged splinters of glass

which jutted up from the sill, Millicent Penrose reached through the spot Joyce had pointed to and grasped a small metal disk on the inner side. It turned easily under the pressure of her fingers.

"Why, you unlocked it from the outside!" Elizabeth exclaimed.

"Yes, and I think that is exactly what someone else did last night," the writer said. "What's more, I'm sure I know how it was done. I used that trick in one of my books."

At her orders, garden gloves were fetched, and with Lee's assistance they began a careful search through the broken fragments of glass on the ground.

Twenty minutes later Miss Penrose gave a jubilant cry. "I've found it!" She extended a glass triangle, two sides of which were raggedly broken. The bottom edge was straight and unnicked, looking as if it had been sliced instead of being hastily knocked out, and to its sharp, clean edge adhered a speck of grayish material.

"Adhesive tape," she identified the substance. "Just as I thought. Somebody cut a hole in the glass large enough to reach through, unlocked the window, and entered the library. By using the tape they were able to knock the glass out noiselessly. They probably thought that the window would explode when the flames reached it and eliminate any trace of its having been cut."

"But—but that means the fire was set deliberately!" Joyce gasped.

"Arson," said Miss Penrose decisively. "Not accident. Won't I have something to say to Cal Wilks!"

"It's getting so a body's not safe in her own bed," Elizabeth grumbled.

Joyce found it difficult to believe that anyone could have intentionally set fire to the house. "Who would have done such a thing?" she asked. "And why?"

Miss Penrose shook her head. "I only wish I knew."

Distressed at the ugly word "arson," and even more disturbed at the thought of the consequences had she not awakened in time to discover the blaze, Joyce again recalled the enigmatic snatches of conversation she had overheard the night before. She waited until Elizabeth had returned to the kitchen, then broached the subject.

"I don't really suppose this has any bearing on the fire," she began, feeling a trifle foolish, "but someone made a telephone call from the Norris house last night, just about the time we were leaving." She repeated the few phrases which had stuck in her mind. "At the time I didn't think anything about it. Now, though, I wonder if it ties in with the fire—if someone has a grudge against you. Perhaps those words might mean more to you than they did to me."

Miss Penrose ran a distraught hand through her hair. "I can't think what I could have done to alienate anyone," she fretted. "I don't meddle in village affairs, and I'm sure I never ran over anybody with the car."

"Somehow I don't think it's anything that simple." Joyce frowned.

"The woman said, 'The girl must have told her something,'" Miss Penrose ruminated. "You don't have any dangerous knowledge, do you, dear? That you might have passed on to me without realizing it?"

"Of course not. I haven't been here long enough to—" Joyce's eyes widened. "Not me. Amy! Amy Dekker!"

"But Amy is gone," her employer pointed out, not understanding.

"Yes, she is. Did you ever think," Joyce went on, "that perhaps Amy didn't get married at all? She might have discovered something that was going on in Pirate's Cove. What if she were kidnaped and then forced to write that note to you? Why, that would explain a lot of things!"

Miss Penrose smiled at Joyce's excited theory. "Now, we mustn't let our imaginations run away with us," she said. "I am certain that if Amy *had* learned about anything, she would have come straight to me. No—I'm afraid that is an idea which belongs in one of my mystery novels."

Joyce didn't seem to mind the rebuke. The writer's words had set off a new chain of thought. "Miss Penrose, where did you get the plot for *Witch's Wind?*" she asked suddenly.

"Why, I suppose it just popped into my head. The basic situations do sometimes, you know. Or somebody makes a chance remark, or I read an item in the paper, and then add all sorts of embellishments of my own."

"You don't suppose that it might have been a

chance remark of Amy's which gave you the idea?" Joyce persisted. "Because it seems awfully strange that we should have a fire immediately after you read the first chapter of that book to the clubwomen last night. Or had you already started the book before Amy came to work for you?"

Miss Penrose tugged at her ear. "No, I hired Amy when I began *Murder at Dawn.* Oh, my dear, you don't really think—"

"Well, I just wonder," Joyce said. "Do you think it could be that *Witch's Wind* represented a threat to somebody? A big enough threat," she added with a shiver, "so that they would take a chance on killing all of us in order to destroy the manuscript?"

They agreed that Elizabeth should be told nothing of this frightening new idea. Even the first shock of the morning, the discovery that the fire had not been an accident, had been enough to send her back to the kitchen looking white and shaken. It would be cruel, they reasoned, to distress her further.

There was not, of course, a shred of evidence to support Joyce's theory. Although Miss Penrose tried valiantly, she was unable to recall how she had first hit upon the plot for *Witch's Wind.* And with the manuscript destroyed, there seemed little likelihood of their ever discovering what, if any, potential danger lay between its pages. But the idea had taken root in both their minds, and occasionally, as they set to the task of clearing away the rubble,

their eyes would meet and they would begin to wonder again.

Barry bicycled up to the door of Pinole Vista shortly before noon, and surprised Joyce and her employer dredging through the debris in the library.

"Oh!" Joyce exclaimed, acutely conscious of her appearance. "It can't be two o'clock yet!"

"I came to see if there was anything I could do," Barry explained. "I would have been here earlier, but I slept late and Aunt Lu gave me the news only about an hour ago." He grimaced, looking around the gutted room. "I'm awfully sorry about what happened," he added awkwardly. "We all are. Aunt Lu asked me to invite you all down to stay with her until things are more settled up here."

"That's very kind of Luella, but as I told her on the telephone, it won't be necessary," Miss Penrose said. "Thanks to Joyce, the fire got no farther than this room. But if you really came to help, you can start with that chair over there. Lee has gone to borrow a truck to cart this wreckage away."

Barry set to manfully, wrestling the larger pieces of furniture outside, while Joyce and Miss Penrose stacked charred bits and shreds of carpeting and draperies into crates. Soon Lee returned with a pickup truck, loaned by a neighboring farmer. There was not much they could do about the flooring, but within a couple of hours the room had been cleared and swept clean of ashes and debris. The books and

other knickknacks which had been spared were stacked into boxes and carried to the attic.

"I'll call painters and carpenters to come in tomorrow morning," Miss Penrose announced, sinking wearily onto a sofa in the living room. "Fortunately the walls don't seem to be badly marred. I shouldn't think it would take too long to repair the damage."

"What you both need is a change of scenery," Barry declared. "I've brought a cooler full of food. How about a picnic in a sylvan glade—or somewhere?"

"You two go ahead," the novelist told them. "I think I'll settle for a bowl of soup and a long nap."

Joyce started to protest, but Miss Penrose insisted that there was nothing more that could be done at the moment.

"You might run upstairs and wash your face before we start out," Barry teased. "Wouldn't want to share my lunch with a scarecrow."

"Ha!" Joyce countered. "Take a look at yourself. You're sootier than a chimney sweep!"

With clean faces, they bicycled away from Pinole Vista. Once on the road outside the curving driveway, Barry suggested that they ride to the top of the hill and down the other side.

"There's a wonderful view of the ocean from there," he explained. "We should find plenty of good picnic spots nearby."

The hill continued upward at a gentle slope. Pedaling easily, Joyce reflected on how good it felt to be out in the air, away from the scene of the

fire. But try as she would, she could not keep her mind from reverting to the near catastrophe.

The more she thought about her theory, the less farfetched it seemed. Taken one by one, the disappearance of Amy Dekker, the destruction of the manuscript, and the overheard phone call were not particularly mysterious in themselves. But when linked to the cleverly broken window, they added up to more than coincidence.

Yes, Joyce decided, the whole chain of events led back to Amy. To her mind, the writer's former secretary was the key to everything which had occurred. But what could have happened to Amy?

"Care to tell me about it?" Barry broke into these disturbing thoughts.

"I'm not sure you'd understand."

"Try me."

Suddenly, Joyce did want to tell him. Maybe, she thought, someone not so closely involved would see things more clearly. If Barry hooted at the idea of *Witch's Wind* menacing someone, then perhaps he might convince her that her imagination had gone on a rampage. On the other hand, he might have some thoughts which would bolster her supposition that something very wrong was going on in Pirate's Cove.

As clearly as possible, without leaving out a thing, she related the events of the previous night.

"So your boss thinks it was arson," he said, when she had finished the tale. "Do you?"

Joyce nodded vigorously, almost losing her bal-

ance. "Have you any idea who could have made that phone call?" she asked.

"Not a glimmer," he admitted. "I was lugging trays into the kitchen part of the time, and the stairs are out of sight of the living room. Anyone could have known where the phone was kept, though, because Aunt Lu showed some movies in the den a couple of months ago. We have a screen and projector up there."

Barry had never met Amy Dekker, having arrived in Pirate's Cove only three weeks before Joyce, but he readily agreed that the girl's disappearance might have a bearing on the case.

"I'll do a little checking around," he promised. "Not much escapes Aunt Lu and Zinnia. Maybe we can find someone who saw Amy leave town, and get a line on her that way."

Relieved that her theory had not been laughingly dismissed, Joyce determined to set her worrisome thoughts aside and concentrate on enjoying the picnic. With Barry as an ally, things tended to look much less dark.

A few yards farther brought them to the crest of the hill. They paused, looking down at a scene of incredible beauty. The ocean seemed very close at hand, although it was almost two miles distant. Peeking out over the tops of the trees a long, red-tiled roof shimmered in the sunlight.

"What is that building over there?" Joyce asked, pointing. "It looks much too large to be a house."

"I'll bet it's the nursing home—Serenity Gardens," Barry said. "Iris mentioned that she worked in this

area. They certainly picked a secluded spot for it."

"Iris Hale?" Joyce asked, in some surprise, remembering the striking blond girl whom she had met at the Cultural Society meeting. "I wouldn't have suspected she was a nurse."

"Not a nurse exactly. I think she sort of baby-sits for some of the inmates. Reads to them and writes their letters—that kind of thing. They cater to a pretty wealthy clientele from what I've heard."

"It's not a—an insane asylum, is it?" Joyce asked uncomfortably.

Barry laughed. "The only insane thing at Serenity Gardens is the price. No, my suspicious friend, it is merely a luxurious rest home for people recovering from long illnesses, and for elderly ladies who have more money than friends."

Using their brakes, they started down the steep grade. The road was little more than a rutted path on this side of the hill. Joyce guessed that there must be another highway somewhere in the vicinity, probably at the far entrance to Serenity Gardens, for the road they were traveling would certainly have been impassable to automobile traffic.

As they neared the bottom of the grade, the rooftop disappeared behind its forest screen. There seemed to be no other habitation between there and the sea.

"You certainly chose an ideal spot for our picnic," Joyce complimented. "I'm sorry now I didn't bring a bathing suit."

"The water is pretty cold, even in summer," Barry said. "I've heard a few shark stories, too.

Better stick to pedaling for your exercise. Watch that branch!"

Joyce ducked, and after that concentrated on steering clear of hazards. Presently they came upon a little brook surrounded by a field of bright poppies. By mutual agreement, they dismounted and carried the food hamper over to the bank.

"What a life!" Barry sighed. He poured lemonade from the Thermos while Joyce heaped their plates with potato salad and dainty sandwiches—obviously leftovers from the meeting.

"I've been thinking about that book," he said later. "I heard the first chapter, but that wasn't more than a sampling of the plot. What makes you think it could have some connection with Pirate's Cove?"

"It was a war story, really—all about saboteurs and how they got into this country without being spotted by the Coast Guard. Anyone who was familiar with Pirate's Cove would recognize the locale." Joyce wrinkled her nose. "I could see how it might worry somebody if it were wartime now and they were doing the same thing, but—well, the war was over a long time ago."

"How did the saboteurs manage to get into the country?" Barry asked.

"By an amphibious plane. It took off from a ship quite far out at sea and landed at a little cove on the California coast. Miss Penrose says there is a cove around here that she used for the description." Joyce sighed. "Honestly, it does seem

like a wild idea, now that I think about the book. I guess I was jumping to conclusions."

"We'll follow up on Amy Dekker anyway. You've got me curious about her now," Barry admitted. "Hey! What about gunrunners? Or opium smugglers?"

"That isn't any worse than my idea," Joyce laughed. "We could—"

A loud whirr directly overhead drowned out the rest of her sentence. The young couple gaped in surprise as a graceful blue and silver plane droned over the treetops. Hinges in the plane's undercarriage opened as they watched, and a set of wheels locked into position.

"Why, he's coming in for a landing," Joyce exclaimed. "I didn't know there was an airfield around here."

"Neither did I. It can't be too far away, either. Let's see if we can find it." Barry scooped up the remains of their luncheon and stuffed them into the cooler.

Joyce scampered for her bike. "Too bad it wasn't a seaplane," she laughed. "We could have fitted it in with our theories."

"No such luck," Barry agreed. "I think if we follow the path and then cut to our right, we ought to be able to catch up with him."

The trail grew even worse as they neared the ocean. Underbrush encroached almost to the center of the ruts, and they were forced to keep a constant watch for low-hanging branches. After riding about half a mile, they decided that it would be easier

and safer to walk, pushing their bicycles ahead of them.

"Even saboteurs would have a tough time plowing through this," Barry grunted, stubbing his toe on a rock.

The trail was becoming practically nonexistent, and Barry suggested that they leave their bikes and cut off into the forest on foot. This proved to be a wise idea, for they had gone no more than a few yards when sounds of activity guided them to their objective.

They emerged into a small clearing. The open space seemed hardly large enough for a landing field; however, the blue and silver plane looked none the worse for its precipitous descent. It stood half in, half out of a ramshackle hangar at the near end of the meadow.

"Hope this guy isn't company-shy," Barry muttered.

The pilot was stretched out beneath the plane, tinkering with one of the wheels. At the sound of their footsteps the hammering ceased, but he appeared to be in no hurry to show himself.

It occurred to Joyce, belatedly, that they were no doubt trespassing on private property. "We watched you come down and couldn't resist seeing the plane at closer ranger," she said, approaching to within a few feet of the prostrate figure. "I hope you don't mind."

The man slid out from beneath the wheels. Despite his oil-stained coveralls and the grease smudge across his forehead, he was an im-

pressive sight. He was one of the tallest men Joyce had ever seen, and certainly one of the handsomest. Beside his huge frame Barry's six-foot stature looked almost short.

"Mind?" he repeated, whipping the cap from his wavy blond hair and engulfing Joyce's fingers in one of his enormous hands. "I should say not!"

SIX

JOYCE was rather taken aback. She had practically expected to be ordered off the field, but instead the pilot was acting as if they were best friends, unexpectedly meeting again after a long separation. She stole a look at Barry's face and almost smiled at his disapproving expression.

"You came along at precisely the right moment," the blond giant confided. He still had not released her hand, and Joyce got the impression that Barry was being excluded from his remarks. "Who wants to work on a beautiful day like this? Come on back in the hangar—I've got some Cokes icing."

"No thanks," Barry said. "We should be getting back. Sorry if we interrupted anything."

Joyce extracted her fingers from the bone-crushing grip. There was certainly nothing flabby about that handshake! "I do feel a litle thirsty," she said, turning to Barry. "As long as we're already here—"

"That's the ticket!" the pilot agreed heartily. "Three Cokes, coming up. By the way, I'm Giles

Stevenson." His gray eyes fastened questioningly on Joyce, and she hastened to introduce Barry and herself.

"I don't like that guy," Barry muttered, when the coveralled figure had disappeared into the hangar's gloomy interior.

"He's just trying to be friendly," Joyce countered. "My goodness, there's no need to act as if he were one of Miss Penrose's saboteurs."

"Wouldn't put it past him." Barry might have added further comments, but was prevented from doing so by the return of Giles Stevenson.

"Here you go," he said, handing them each a frosty bottle. "Ah! This is better than lying in the dirt under *Queenie*."

Joyce looked admiringly at the sleek blue and silver plane. Although *Queenie* had only one engine, she was roomy enough to accommodate four or five persons.

Giles Stevenson followed her gaze and walked over to pat the trim fuselage. "The landing gear has been giving me trouble," he explained. "The wheels felt pretty wobbly when I set down a while ago. I was just tightening up a few bolts."

"Isn't this a pretty isolated spot for a landing field?" Barry asked.

"Sure is," the pilot admitted. "But neither Ashville nor Pirate's Cove has a field of any description. I truck freight in for both towns. Passengers, too, though not so often. This is the best home I could find for *Queenie*."

Joyce wondered what sort of freight, but decided

that it would be rude to ask too many questions.

"I suppose we should be going," she said, handing back the Coke bottle. "It was awfully nice meeting you."

"I was hoping we could become better acquainted." This time there could be no doubt that Mr. Stevenson was speaking to her alone. "I don't know many people around here. Flying is a lonely business. Would you like to come for a spin with me next Sunday?"

"Well, I—" Joyce didn't quite know how to answer. "I don't really have much free time," she fibbed. "Thank you, though, for inviting me."

Obviously Giles Stevenson was unused to having his invitations refused. "I'll call you," he said, in a low voice. "You wouldn't want to be a dull girl, would you? All work and no play—"

"—means money in the bank," Joyce ad-libbed. Barry's hand tightened on her arm. "Good-bye," she called back.

"What a character!" Barry said in derision. "I hope you didn't fall for that line of his."

Joyce felt unaccountably angered. Although her own private estimation of Giles Stevenson placed him in the "wolf" category, she resented being told what to do. Who did Barry Randolph think he was?

"I thought he was rather nice," she said primly. "And I've never been up in a small plane. It might be fun."

"It might not. There's no way of walking home when you're up in the air, you know."

Joyce bit off a heated retort. Barry was right, she

decided reluctantly, although he needn't have sounded quite so pompous. And it was silly to go on arguing when she never had any intention of accepting the invitation. She wondered if perhaps jealousy might be behind Barry's attitude.

"Let's not fight," she offered a truce. "We really should be trying to solve the mystery of the fire. Do you know of anyone in the village who dislikes Miss Penrose?"

"Not a soul. It's a pretty close-knit little community. I'm sure it would be common gossip if anyone did have a grudge against her."

"Darn! We're stymied at every turn. Honestly, I can't think of a single motive."

"You've already thought of a good one," Barry reminded her. "Look at the way the fire was started. If someone just wanted to burn the house down, he could have accomplished it easier by starting at the rear, where it would be less likely to be noticed. Instead, he picked on the library, where the manuscript was kept. Nope—I think you hit it the first time round."

Barry's good humor had been completely restored. As they trudged back along the trail, guiding their bicycles, Joyce recounted as many of the details of *Witch's Wind* as she could recall, but the minor plot complications only seemed to add to their confusion. Neither of them was able to relate a single incident in the book to anything which might have occurred in Pirate's Cove.

"Unless it was something which happened years and years ago," Joyce thought aloud. "Maybe one of

the saboteurs liked this country so well he decided to settle down here."

"Now you're confusing fact with fiction," Barry pointed out. "I don't think there ever were any saboteurs in these parts. That's strictly book stuff. Rats!" He banged his fist against the handlebars. "What I wouldn't give to be able to read that first chapter. Unless we're trying to steal home on a foul ball, the clue has to be there, in those first few pages. The rest of the book doesn't really count."

Joyce groaned. They were right back where they had started!

Giles Stevenson was not mentioned again. Joyce had already decided that she found his too-intimate manner unappealing. The storm-tactics approach had probably gone over well with other girls, but as for herself she preferred a more easygoing relationship. She did wonder, though, why she had not heard the pilot mentioned before this. Surely, she thought, his exceptional good looks and glamorous occupation should have stood high on the list of conversational topics in a gossipy community like Pirate's Cove. Then she remembered that he had mentioned Ashville, and decided that his base of operations was probably in the neighboring town. That would place him in the "outsider" class. And the villagers were too engrossed in their own affairs to pay much heed to outsiders.

Satisfied with this pat explanation, Joyce turned her attention back to the riddle of the fire. It seemed as though she had spent half her life pondering over *it, instead of just a few hours.*

"The woman who made the phone call had a confederate, that's for sure," she mused. "I doubt that she set the blaze herself. It would be an awfully risky business for a woman."

"Equally risky for a man, unless he'd had experience in that line of work," Barry answered. "Let's see. Who among the women at the party could have a sinister cohort?" He reeled off a list of names: "Thelma Young—she's a widow. Zinnia Fisher—she divides her affections between books and pastels. Harriet Wilks—well, her husband is the Fire Chief; could be she was drumming up business—"

"He thought *I'd* done it," Joyce interrupted. "Mr. Wilks practically accused me of smoking in private. As if Miss Penrose would mind if I smoked. But both Mrs. Wilks and Miss Fisher were downstairs when the phone call was being made. Who else?"

"Agatha Cruikshank—she's eighty if she's a day, and I seem to recall her toddling off early. Mary Larker—her husband owns the dairy. Iris—can't see our angel of mercy tampering with your library window."

"No," Joyce admitted grudgingly. She couldn't picture the dainty blond girl chancing a cut finger, not to mention severe burns, if something had gone wrong. "Who is Iris Hale anyway? She looks more like a fashion model than a—an angel of mercy."

"I don't know her folks, if that's what you mean," Barry answered. "Seems to me Aunt Lu mentioned that she came from Sacramento. I think she's supporting an elderly grandmother or something. She's an awfully nice kid," he added enthusiastically. "I

see her at the library a couple of times a week. She comes in to borrow books for her patients. Seems they have everything except a library at Serenity Gardens."

Joyce was irritated by the twinge of—was it envy?—his words evoked. Why should she care how often Barry saw Iris Hale?

"Might as well admit it," she told herself ruefully. "You're getting fonder of this boy by the minute. And that blonde is competition!"

"Well, there don't seem to be any suspicious characters in the Pirate's Cove Cultural Society," she remarked. A sudden idea occurred to her. "What about your maid, the stout woman who let us in?"

"Elvira?" Barry laughed. "Not a chance. She did the dishes and took off like a flash before ten o'clock. Opposed to overtime is our Elvira." He shrugged. "That's the lot of them. Take your pick. Last one out is a firebug."

Joyce felt her head begin to throb. "I wish I had never seen that broken window!" she said vehemently. "I hate being suspicious of people. Why couldn't it have been an accident?"

"Why did it happen at all? That's the crux of the matter," Barry countered.

To Joyce's weary arms and legs it seemed as if she were pushing a tank instead of a light bicycle. Going down the hill had been a snap, but ascending the steep grade proved to be much more difficult. She felt a stab of sympathy for Barry, who had the unwieldy food hamper to manage as well as his bicycle. His dark hair hung damply over his fore-

head, and his face was flushed from the strenuous climb. The top of the hill was a welcome sight.

"I'll fix a pitcher of iced coffee when we get back," Joyce promised, after a brief rest had eased their aching muscles. "Can you stay for dinner? I know Miss Penrose would love to have you."

Barry remarked with a tired grin that the thought of iced coffee was the only incentive which kept him pedaling, but declined the dinner invitation. "Clinton and Howe," he explained regretfully. "I'm working on the conclusion at last. Another week, and I expect to be finished."

They parked their bicycles at the garage and started around to the rear of the house. Joyce fought down a shudder at the sight of the boarded-up library window—a grim reminder of the near-tragic blaze. She turned to find Barry gazing spellbound at an animated bush.

"Hallucinations! I've been working too hard," he groaned.

"Afraid we haven't any pink elephants today," Joyce giggled. She marched over to the bush and reached in among the quivering leaves. "Here's your hallucination. Mr. Randolph, may I present Señor Gordo?"

The gray ball of fur gave the couple an outraged look and leaped out of Joyce's arms. In a moment the bush began trembling anew.

"He must have caught a mouse or a baby gopher," Joyce said, stooping down to part the branches.

"Here, let me see. Might be a snake." Barry prodded cautiously and gave a low whistle as he

pulled out a battered tin can. "What ho! What have we here?"

On its surface, between the scratches inflicted by the cat's claws, Joyce could make out the words "High octane."

"Gasoline," Barry said, sniffing the empty can. "Powerful stuff, too, I'd say."

Joyce gave a little cry. "You don't suppose—"

"Wouldn't be a bit surprised. Somebody wanted to make sure the fire didn't go out before it had accomplished its purpose."

"Oh!" Joyce took her hand away quickly. "Fingerprints!"

"They're too smart for that," Barry disclaimed. "I doubt that this would even count as evidence if we were to call the police. Anyone could have thrown the can away—any time, too, between the last rain and now. There's no telling where the cat found it, either. Some out-of-the-way spot, I'd guarantee."

"Just the same, I'm going to put it in a safe place. With this and the piece of adhesive on the window we've got some proof of arson. And something else may turn up."

"Something with the firebug's name on it, I hope. Hey! There's your boss."

Joyce glanced up. Miss Penrose was signaling from a window. She appeared to be in a state of high excitement.

"Come in here, quickly," she called to them in a carefully guarded voice.

Wondering what was up, Joyce and Barry hurried

through the side entrance and into the study. Miss Penrose waited until they had closed the door, then crossed to lower the window.

"What's wrong?" Joyce asked.

"I've found it," Miss Penrose whispered. "I've found *Witch's Wind!*"

SEVEN

THERE was a moment's stunned silence before Joyce repeated incredulously, "You've found *Witch's Wind!*"

"Then it wasn't burned?" Barry said. "But I thought—"

"The *typed* copy was burned," Miss Penrose said meaningfully. "But not these!" She whipped away a scarf which had been concealing a stack of spiral-bound notebooks, and laughed at the bewilderment on their faces.

"The originals! How—"

"It went clear out of my head, what with the fire and all," the novelist continued. "I took them out of your desk file yesterday morning. There were some notes in the back of one of the binders which I needed for the solution of the mystery. I usually work out the climax first, and then go ahead with the rest of the book," she explained. "But I couldn't remember just which binder I had used, so I took the whole pile of them and set them over there on

the mantel until I could go through them. Wasn't that lucky?"

"Lucky isn't the word for it," Joyce said fervently. She thought of all the times she had scoffed at her employer's disorganized working habits. Never again!

Miss Penrose's dumpling face glowed with elation at her coup. "I expect the arsonist thought that, since we were still in the draft stage, there would be only the one copy."

Barry thumbed through the stack of notebooks in search of the one marked "Chapter 1." He glanced up suddenly. "You haven't told anyone else about finding these, have you?"

"No, not a soul."

"Good. Look," he went on, with a serious expression, "Joyce told me the whole story—about the broken window and the phone call—everything. If she's right about the reason for the fire, then it looks as if someone was desperate to get rid of this manuscript. There's no reason to think they would balk at a second try. And the next time they won't do a halfway job."

Miss Penrose blanched. "I hadn't thought of that."

"For your own safety and—and everyone else's," Barry continued, with a glance at Joyce, "I think it would be best to let it ride. *Status quo.* As far as the people of Pirate's Cove are concerned, *Witch's Wind* went up in smoke last night—*all of it.* No one must suspect there was another copy until the book is safely in the hands of your publishers. Unless you aren't planning to finish it?"

"Of course we are!" Joyce said. "Do you think we're afraid?"

Miss Penrose had shaken off her fright and now seemed to be almost enjoying the situation. "We'll work on it in the dead of night if we have to," she said with a laugh. "Like Penelope in the Greek myth, who knitted by day and unraveled by moonlight."

"May I read that first chapter?" Barry asked. "There has to be something in it that we haven't recognized so far."

"I can't imagine what it could be," the writer insisted. "I made the whole thing up out of my own head. It's fiction, through and through."

Nevertheless, she did not object when Barry settled himself in a chair and began to read the penciled scrawl. Twenty minutes later he closed the notebook.

"I don't get it," he frowned. "It's as innocent as one of Aunt Lu's poems."

Miss Penrose shuddered at the comparison.

"There *must* be something!" Joyce cried in exasperation. "Let me see."

Barry surrendered the notebook. Joyce read aloud, pronouncing each sentence as carefully as if it were being considered for an award. Midway through the third page Barry interrupted.

"Read that last bit again."

Obligingly, Joyce repeated the paragraph. "Does that suggest something to you?" she asked.

But Barry just looked disappointed. "Guess not. For a minute, though—well, that description of the woodland sounded familiar. Go ahead."

Joyce continued on to the end of the chapter, then slowly closed the notebook. "If there is a connection between the book and some mysterious activity in Pirate's Cove, I simply can't see it."

Barry was leaning back with his eyes closed. "If you hadn't told me about the saboteurs, I wouldn't have guessed the plot was headed that way," he said thoughtfully. "All we know by the end of the first chapter is that a couple of men have made an illegal landing on the shore. Being mystery fans, we suspect that they're up to no good, but as yet their intentions haven't been revealed. The only thing that struck me, besides the familiar landscape, is the fact that one of the men is anxious to keep his face hidden."

"That's because he had lived in the area for a time before the war." Miss Penrose enlarged on this facet of the plot. "He can't afford to be recognized."

The clock chimed six. Barry gave it a startled look and jumped to his feet. "I've got to get moving. Shouldn't have stayed this long. Look, there probably isn't a thing to worry about, but just the same I'd feel better if you went ahead with our plan. Pretend you have buried *Witch's Wind* and have no intention of resurrecting it."

Miss Penrose agreed.

Joyce walked with Barry to the door. "I'll give you a rain check on the iced coffee," she laughed. "And please don't worry about us. I guess I got carried away by the sinister atmosphere. That's what comes of working for a mystery writer."

"All the same," he said, "I'm going to ask around

about Amy Dekker. If she were to show up with a bridegroom in tow, I could go back to Clinton and Howe with an easier mind."

Joyce watched him stride around the corner of the house. So Barry had not entirely abandoned her theory—mostly, she supposed, because there seemed no reasonable alternative to take its place. If the fire had not been set to destroy *Witch's Wind,* why was it started?

Because, of course, there was no doubt that it had been arson.

She sighed and picked up the red gasoline can from the entryway where she had left it upon receiving her employer's summons. If only Señor Gordo could talk!

Miss Penrose examined the gasoline container carefully, and sniffed at its brim. "No use going to Cal Wilks with what we know," she said tartly. "He'd only beat around the bush and tell me to stick to my murder mysteries."

"What *are* we going to do?"

Miss Penrose patted the notebooks. "We're going to finish *Witch's Wind!*"

The typewriter was not so new, the desk not so comfortable, as the ones she had used previously. Nevertheless, Joyce made good progress with the manuscript. She worked in a small room off the kitchen until repairs on the library could be completed, and found that she enjoyed having Elizabeth's companionable presence nearby. To Miss Penrose's amusement, Joyce insisted on making as

many carbon copies of the draft as the machine could be coaxed into producing, and these she distributed in odd hiding places about the house. Elizabeth was astonished to find one between her cookbooks in the pantry.

"Land sakes!" the housekeeper grumbled. "You'd think you were typing directions to a lost gold mine. What's the idea?"

"I just want to make sure nothing happens to it this time," Joyce told her.

A crew of carpenters and painters had arrived. They were amiable fellows for the most part, who seemed to take pride in their work. Each day the library looked less like a ruin and more like a habitable room.

"I've ordered new draperies made. The seamstress should have them finished soon," Miss Penrose said one morning, after inspecting the renovated room. "And I'm quite sure we have a carpet in the attic which we can use in here."

"There's a sofa and three or four chairs up there too," Elizabeth announced. "No sense in spending more money when the old furniture will do just as well."

"Why don't we have a look at it?" Joyce suggested. "I'll help Lee move the things down if you find they are suitable."

The attic was enormous, extending over the whole house. It had been partitioned off into three cavernous rooms. The one farthest back was crowded with hand-carved furniture and mementos of early days in California.

"My grandfather made these himself when he first moved out West," Miss Penrose explained. "Later he went into the shipping business. Most of the things you've seen downstairs were either brought around the Horn or imported from the Orient. Many of the books were his, too. He was very proud of this house. I have tried to keep it the way he would have liked."

"He must have been a fine old gentleman. I'm so glad his portrait was saved."

As Joyce replaced the dust sheets over the old furniture, she was thinking about the man who had taken such pains with the handsome chairs and tables. How he would have hated the thought of an arsonist tampering with his beautiful house!

The next room stood empty; but beyond the third partition they found two carpets, carefully preserved from the moths, and several pieces of furniture which would serve very well in the library. After some discussion, Miss Penrose chose the floral-patterned rug, and selected chairs, a desk, and sofa.

"I could bring the books down now and start arranging them on the shelves," Joyce suggested. "The carpenters did a really nice job refinishing the bookcases. Then, this afternoon, we can have Lee help carry down the rest of these things. They don't look particularly heavy."

After making several trips to the attic, Joyce began uncrating the books. A number of the volumes, though well preserved, were quite old. There were also many mysteries and current novels.

On the flyleaf of one of the detective stories she found the name "Amy Dekker" inscribed. Curiously, she hunted through the rest of the books and found almost thirty more, with Amy's name in them. Joyce found an opportunity to speak with Miss Penrose soon after making this discovery.

"Oh yes, Amy was quite a reader," the novelist confirmed. "She was particularly fond of mysteries. I sometimes think she took this job in order to read my books as she went along."

"Didn't she want to take her books with her when she left?" Joyce inquired.

"Well, actually, that was my fault. You see, Elizabeth was away the day Amy's note came—her sister was ill. The fellow who delivered it waited for Amy's baggage. He was quite insistent that I pack it immediately, and I'm afraid I overlooked a number of her things. Elizabeth sorted them out when she got back and packed them in the attic. I do wish Amy would come and get them."

"How very odd," Joyce murmured, for not the first time. In fact, each new piece of information which turned up concerning Amy Dekker seemed more peculiar than the last. "Would you mind if I looked at her things?" she asked. "There might be some indication of where she has gone. Perhaps we can trace her through an address book, or something of that kind."

"Go ahead and look," Miss Penrose said. "It can't do any harm. Though I think if there had been anything like that, Elizabeth would have noticed it."

This did not keep Joyce from heading again for

the attic as soon as she found a free moment. Soon she came across a large trunk labeled with the girl's name. Feeling slightly embarrassed at the thought of snooping through another person's belongings, Joyce quieted her conscience by telling herself that Amy could be the key to the mystery of the fire.

The moment she opened the trunk this feeling was intensified. Some of the items were of little value—umbrella, galoshes, knickknacks—but among these were folded two skirts that looked quite expensive, and a coat which seemed practically new. All three garments bore dry-cleaner's tags, which explained why they had not been packed and sent with Amy's other clothing.

"It's all wrong!" she insisted to herself. "No girl goes off and abandons some of her best clothes."

Joyce decided that if she was going to do the job, she might as well do it thoroughly. She spread a sheet on the floor and stacked each item neatly upon it, after examining the pockets and other places where an address book might be concealed. Her spirits began to sag as she neared the bottom of the trunk.

"Guess Miss P. was right," she admitted glumly.

Two pairs of gloves joined the things on the sheet. On top of these she piled a bathing suit and cap, a tennis racquet, and a pair of run-down loafers. Finally Joyce removed the last article—a sports jacket. Without any real expectation of success, she ran her hand through the pocket—and pulled out a sheet of paper.

"A letter!" she breathed excitedly.

Quickly she glanced at the date; May 8—five weeks before Joyce had come to Pinole Vista.

"Darling," she read, and winced, hoping it was not going to be a love letter. But she had no choice. The letter might be extremely important.

Darling:

Please forgive me for the things I said the other day. It was inexcusable to snap at you. You had every right to ask, and I mean to tell you. But not now, not this way. I must have a chance to explain. Meet me Wednesday at the usual place. I'll be waiting, my dearest.

The letter was unsigned. "Rats!" Joyce exclaimed. "This is worse than hopeless!"

She ran her eyes over the few lines again, trying to piece out a meaning beyond the words written there.

"Amy had a quarrel with her boy friend," she guessed. "He got angry because she asked him a certain question, and then changed his mind and wanted to make up with her. So she met him on that Wednesday as he asked, and he talked her into forgiving him. He must have been a pretty convincing talker, too, if she decided to marry him right afterward."

She glanced again at the date, May 8, and made a note to ask Elizabeth or Miss Penrose exactly when Amy had left Pinole Vista. Then she read the letter a third time. Gradually, a feeling of doubt came over her.

That could have been what happened, Joyce

reasoned, but there might also be a second interpretation. That Amy and the letter writer had quarreled was obvious. But why? Because Amy had asked the wrong question—a question so upsetting to the man that he became angry and refused to answer. So Amy had come home and cried herself to sleep for a few nights, as Elizabeth had mentioned.

But, Joyce went on, by now completely immersed in speculation, the man who had written the letter then grew afraid that Amy knew too much about—about whatever she had asked about. So he worked out a plan. He would write to Amy, beg her forgiveness, and ask her to meet him, the "usual place" no doubt being some out-of-the-way spot where they wouldn't be seen. When she did, he took steps to ensure that she *couldn't* talk to anyone. What had happened to her was anybody's guess, but Joyce would have been willing to bet that Amy hadn't written that note of elopement of her own free will.

"And that's why she never came back for the rest of her clothes," she said to herself exultantly. "He wouldn't let her go, once he had her. Amy knew too much for her own good—and his!"

Stunned by this dreadful thought, Joyce let the jacket drop to the floor. A tiny metal object fell from the pocket and tinkled against the boards. She bent down and picked up a delicate bracelet from which a single charm dangled. It was a little silver airplane.

She turned it over in her hand, squinting to read the minute inscription.

"A. from G.," she read. "Amy from —" She caught her breath and stared dumbfounded at the silver charm. "Amy from Giles!"

EIGHT

JOYCE found it difficult to wrench her eyes from the charm's hypnotic movement as the little silver airplane revolved gently on its chain.

Giles Stevenson! There were numerous men whose names began with G, but how many of them shared the pilot's interest in aircraft? Joyce could think of no one else in the vicinity of Pirate's Cove who fitted the description. As Giles himself had mentioned, there was not even a landing field anywhere in the area.

"But what possible reason could he have had for wanting to harm Amy?" she murmured.

She glanced again at the letter clenched in her hand. The answer, she felt, lay there. Amy had got mixed up in something that was none of her business. Quite innocently, she had asked a question which alerted the man to his danger.

"There's no indication that the letter writer and the G of the charm are the same man," she reminded herself. "Amy might have had lots of boy friends."

Joyce wished now that she had not been so quick to refuse Giles' invitation! Even if he was not the person who had written the letter, chances were he could tell her a great deal about Amy Dekker.

After a moment's reflection, Joyce stuck the letter and bracelet into her pocket and stooped to repack Amy's belongings.

Elizabeth was in the midst of luncheon preparations when Joyce came into the kitchen. She set about making herself useful, wondering how she could ask a few questions nonchalantly enough so as to avoid arousing the housekeeper's suspicions.

"How is your sister feeling now?" Joyce asked, arranging silver and dishes on the tea cart.

"Her rheumatism acts up a mite now and then," the housekeeper replied unsuspectingly. "By and large, though, she's much improved. Had the doctors mighty worried when I was down there last month, but Alice fooled them and pulled right out of it. Good constitution. Runs in the family."

"I imagine Miss Penrose was lost without you. Were you away long?"

"Three days. The doctor telephoned me on the tenth. I remember because it was my niece's birthday the day before, and I thought at the time that Alice had overdone on account of that. Went to her right away, of course. Fond as I am of Miss Millie, flesh and blood comes first."

"Well, I'm glad it was nothing serious." Joyce shot a glance at the calendar. The tenth of May had

fallen on a Tuesday, and Amy had vanished the next day. It all fitted in with the letter!

"Do you know of a good jeweler around here?" she asked presently. "I'm afraid the setting on my pearl ring has come loose."

Elizabeth added a salad to the dishes on the tray. "Will Gunther over in Ashville is the only jeweler in these parts. He does fine work—fixed my cameo pin nice as can be."

With answers gained to two of her three questions, Joyce wheeled the tea cart out onto the patio and sat down to lunch with her employer. She had debated about telling Miss Penrose of her discoveries, and had come to the conclusion that it was wiser to keep the knowledge to herself for the time being. There was really nothing concrete to go on, and Miss Penrose might as well be spared the disappointment if her investigations came to nothing.

After stating truthfully that she had not found an address book, Joyce maneuvered the conversation around to Amy Dekker's past life.

"Elizabeth mentioned that Amy was very pretty," she remarked. "I suppose she had many boy friends?"

"No, I wouldn't say that," Miss Penrose replied, handing down a tidbit to Señor Gordo. "Amy was a rather shy girl, especially around strangers. She didn't make friends too easily. Ted Bancroft, the bank teller, took her to the movies once or twice, but nothing ever came of it. Her elopement really was a surprise to me. I wouldn't have thought she knew any young man that well."

"An approaching wedding is a big secret to keep to yourself." Joyce smiled. "It does seem strange that she didn't say a word about it."

Miss Penrose looked slightly uncomfortable. "Well, she might have, and I just didn't realize what she was hinting at. If I'm working on a plot, I don't always listen too closely. Amy did ramble on, you know. She could talk around a subject until she wore out its edges without actually saying what she meant. I do hope her husband is a good listener."

Joyce said that she hoped so too, then let the matter drop. She was delighted at the results brought about by seemingly casual inquiries. Elizabeth had unwittingly confirmed that the date of Amy's disappearance and the Wednesday mentioned in the letter coincided, and she had furnished the name of the only jeweler within forty miles. Miss Penrose's replies had been less fruitful, but at least she had disclosed that Amy did not have a long string of admirers.

"Because of the letter, I know there certainly was one man in her life," Joyce told herself. "He must have a very forceful personality to have surmounted Amy's shyness."

"And Giles," she added mentally, "specialized in bulldozer tactics! The poor girl had probably been swept right off her feet!"

As soon as the table was cleared, she hurried to the telephone. Barry had called her two days after their picnic and made a negative report. Not even the most inquisitive gossip in town had seen Amy Dekker on the day of her disappearance.

"That's another thing which points to Giles," she reflected, spinning the dial. "If she were going to meet him, she would probably have taken that deserted old road. No wonder nobody saw her."

Much to the girl's disappointment, Mrs. Norris answered the call. She informed Joyce that Barry had come down with a bad case of summer flu and that the doctor had ordered him to bed for the rest of the week.

"Wouldn't you know!" Joyce said in disgust, after she had thanked Barry's aunt and hung up the receiver. "I guess I've been elected. Joyce Farrell, girl snooper."

On further reflection, though, she decided that perhaps it was just as well that Barry had been temporarily felled by the flu. Much as she would have liked his opinion on her discoveries, she knew instinctively that he would protest against her seeing Giles Stevenson again and insist upon tackling the problem himself. And Joyce had not come this far only to be left behind when the excitement started.

She sat down on a windowsill in the empty library to think out a logical method of procedure. So far, she reproached herself, she had been jumping to conclusions and formulating wild theories with nothing more than guesses and suspicions as a guide. Proof was the element most lacking in the whole mysterious chain of events which had taken place. And proof in the form of concrete evidence against some particular person or persons was what she vitally needed.

Joyce reached into her pocket and ran her fingers

over the little silver charm. The next step seemed obvious. She had to find the rest of the name which began with G.

Miss Penrose looked up from the stack of notebooks in which she had been burrowing as Joyce picked her way across the littered study floor.

"Looks like you're earning our daily bread," the girl smiled.

"Daily cracker crumbs, I'm afraid, if I don't find a clever escape route for my hero," the writer said despairingly. "I've gotten him into a terrible muddle, and now I can't get him out."

"Why not have the heroine come to his rescue?"

"Humph! I haven't given you Chapter 14 yet. She's bound hand and foot in the basement, and the seaplane is due in half an hour's time to take them all out of the country."

"And the time bombs are ticking away in the munitions factory, and a hungry alligator is swimming in with the water pouring into the basement, and—" Joyce laughed.

"Don't joke about it! You make *Witch's Wind* sound like an old-fashioned melodrama!" Nevertheless, Miss Penrose laughed too. "Oh, I'll think of something. I always do. But at the moment things seem hopelessly black."

"Is there anything I can do?" Joyce asked. "Lee is over at the Jacobs farm helping them pick corn, so we've postponed the furniture moving until tomorrow. He said it was only fair to repay the favor, since Mr. Jacobs loaned us his truck."

"No, dear, you run along and get some fresh air.

There will be plenty for you to do when I've fought my way out of this mess."

"Then if you don't mind, I'd like to drive over to Ashville. I—I have an errand—"

"Of course." Miss Penrose waved aside Joyce's explanation. "The car keys are in the kitchen. Have a good time!"

When Joyce looked back before closing the study door Miss Penrose was bending over her notebooks again, obviously happy to be left alone with them.

"I'll be sorry when the summer is over," she said to herself, with a pang. "She's such an old darling, I'll hate to leave."

Joyce continued to think about Miss Penrose after taking the keys from a kitchen drawer and backing the station wagon from the garage. She had often wondered why someone with as romantic a nature as her employer possessed had never married. Professor Thisbe was unmarried, too, she knew, and a chance remark of Elizabeth's had led her to wonder if perhaps there had once been a romantic attachment between him and Miss Penrose.

"Wouldn't it be nice if the two of them would get together again," she mused. Then she had to laugh at herself. She was the romantic one, not Miss Penrose. And in all honesty she had to admit that both objects of her speculation seemed perfectly happy as they were.

Suddenly she thought of Amy Dekker again. "I'd give my third-year credits to know where she is right now."

Traffic on the way to Ashville was light, and the

road well paved. Joyce drove at a moderate speed, admiring the scenery. She was pleasantly surprised to find that the road led right past the building she had glimpsed from afar, and she slowed to a creeping pace in order to get a thorough look at Serenity Gardens.

A sweeping driveway rimmed with pink and white oleander bushes led up to the nursing home. It was a large, two-storied building built in early California style, and even the cool white walls rising from the beautifully tended lawn had a peaceful aura about them. Joyce thought the name Serenity Gardens suited it perfectly.

She covered the remaining five miles in good time. Although Ashville was by no means a metropolis, it was considerably larger than Pirate's Cove. Searching for a parking space along the busy main street, Joyce noted a number of specialty shops, and surmised that when anyone from the neighboring village had any serious shopping to do they probably came to Ashville.

After feeding the parking meter and gazing up and down the street, she spied a clock-topped sign bearing the legend "Gunther's." She crossed over and walked slowly toward the jewelry shop. A feeling of uneasiness rose up in her, and her footsteps grew even more lagging. For the first time Joyce paused to question the wisdom of her errand.

"It is too my business," she snapped back at her own unspoken admonition. "I might have been killed in that fire. That certainly gives me the right to find out what I can!"

She squared her shoulders and entered the shop. A bell tinkled at her entrance. She could hear someone moving about behind the rear partition.

"Be right with you," a voice called.

The glass cases held a variety of goods, ranging from modish earrings and necklaces to heavy, old-fashioned "turnip" watches, complete with chains. Silver flatware and tea services filled one of the cases, while another was devoted to clocks. Joyce paid these little heed, for she had found something of greater interest. On the bottom shelf of one of the display cases was a jumbled assortment of charm bracelets.

She had just stooped down for a closer look at the array when shuffling footsteps heralded the entrance of the jeweler. Mr. Gunther was a little old man with bushy eyebrows, and sideburns which ended in puffs at the base of his ears. This growth was doubly noticeable because of the fact that his head itself was completely hairless except for a wispy fringe along his neck. He looked, Joyce thought, like a character out of Dickens.

"Good afternoon," she smiled, producing Amy's charm bracelet. "I wonder if you could tell me whether this is your work?"

Mr. Gunther took the bracelet and cocked his head sideways to examine the miniature airplane. "Yes, I should say that it was," he nodded. "The chain is quite an ordinary one, but the engraving—yes, yes I did that."

"Then I'm in luck," Joyce beamed. "You see, I found the bracelet and am anxious to locate its

owner." That was certainly true, she decided, having a natural distaste for falsehoods. No one could have been more anxious to locate Amy Dekker than she was.

"If you could remember who purchased the bracelet, I might be able to trace the owner that way," she went on.

Mr. Gunther puckered his forehead in an effort to jog his memory. "Dear, dear, that is a problem," he exclaimed mildly. 'I do so much of this sort of thing. Let me—oh! perhaps it would be in my book. I only keep records for the current year, though; so unless it was a recent purchase, I'm afraid I won't be able to help you."

The jeweler moved his fingers unhurriedly across one page after another. Joyce had an almost irresistible temptation to spur him on with words of encouragement, but she wisely refrained. Additional conversation would only slow down the process. Also, she reminded herself, too much eagerness might set the elderly man to wondering about the reason for her anxiety.

After no more than a few minutes, he emitted a grunt of satisfaction.

"Here we are! April 14. Standard chain, airplane charm. Engrave 'A. from G.' "

Joyce could have cried in disappointment. "It doesn't say who ordered the bracelet?"

"Eh? Oh, yes indeed! A Mr. Giles Stevenson."

Joyce barely restrained a whoop of glee.

She thanked the jeweler, and out of gratitude purchased a travel alarm clock for which she had not

the slightest need. As soon as the transaction was completed, she left the shop, making sure the bracelet was secure in the zippered compartment of her purse.

Joyce was elated with the result of the interview with Mr. Gunther, but she realized that she still had a long way to go before she could link the pilot with Amy's disappearance, or even to the letter found in the girl's jacket. But her hunch had paid off. At last she had something to go on.

She floated gaily down the sidewalk, scarcely noticing the stores she passed or her fellow pedestrians. Waiting for the light to change at the crosswalk, she suddenly felt a hand on her shoulder. It slipped down to her elbow as the people surged across the street. Joyce jerked her head up in alarm and found her gaze riveted to a pair of mocking gray eyes.

"Been shopping?" Giles Stevenson asked.

NINE

TRYING not to betray her shock, Joyce walked across the street.

"Sorry if I startled you," Giles apologized.

The naturalness of his comment brought her composure back.

"I had been thinking of something else," she admitted. "You seemed to spring up from the cement at me."

Giles, still staring, said, "You've given me quite a lot of trouble. Why aren't you in the phone book?"

"Fools' names and fools' faces—" A light note. That was better. Joyce smiled enigmatically. Let him think she was a mystery woman.

They were across the street now, and the station wagon loomed three cars away. For an instant she was tempted to make a dash toward it, to plead haste and drive full speed back to the sanctuary of Pinole Vista. With an effort, she fought back the impulse.

"Cowardice isn't going to find Amy Dekker," she

told herself sternly. "You've got to go through with this!"

Docilely she allowed herself to be led along to an ice-cream parlor in the middle of the block. Giles selected a rear table well away from a group of chattering girls.

"You've been avoiding me," he accused her.

"Well, hardly," Joyce smiled, feeling more at ease with a brimming chocolate milk shake in front of her. "You couldn't expect me to go pedaling out to your hangar just to say hello, could you?"

"You might have given me your phone number."

"Without being asked for it?" Joyce shook her head and managed to look demure.

Giles' booming laugh rang out. "You outsmarted me," he admitted. "All right, I give up. Dear, elusive, evasive Miss Joyce Farrell, will you do me the honor of furnishing me with the top-secret digits of your dial?"

Once again Joyce was struck by the magnetism of his personality. In spite of her distrust of the handsome pilot, she could readily see how any girl would be flattered by his attentions.

"Pirate's Cove 396," she said.

"A step in the right direction at last. Prefix and all shall be indelibly engraved across my throbbing heart."

"Or penciled in your little black book." She imitated his bantering tone.

"Are you of the idle rich or the industrious poor?" Giles asked.

Watching his face very carefully, Joyce said, "I'm

secretary to a writer. Her name is Millicent Penrose."

A spark of recognition flickered in his eyes, but that was all.

"Say, I've read some of her stuff," he exclaimed. "Didn't know she lived around here, though. It must be an interesting job." He finished his malted, then said casually, "Bet you get the inside dope on all her stories. Is she writing another mystery now?"

"We started a new one last week." Joyce injected a note of enthusiasm into her voice. "It's very topical, and should sell like ice cream in August." She thought frantically, and her mind responded with a newspaper headline which had taken her interest a few days before. "All about the DEW-Line warning system in coastal Alaska."

"Sounds good," Giles said, but plainly he was not much concerned with Miss Penrose's literary endeavors. At her first mention of the DEW-Line, his intent alertness had tapered off into a polite but uninterested expression.

He dropped a handful of change on the table and took her elbow again as they left the fountain. "Noon on Sunday all right with you?" he asked. "Flying in one of the big birds can't compare with a ride in *Queenie*. That suspicious boy friend of yours needn't know a thing about it."

"I don't need his permission to go anywhere," Joyce said coolly, irritated by his offhand reference to Barry.

Giles shrugged. "Sorry. The way he acted the

other day I got the impression he had an option on you. Noon on Sunday, then?"

"Noon on Sunday," Joyce affirmed. She withdrew her arm from his grasp and walked over to her car. Her second encounter with Giles Stevenson had not increased her admiration of him. Like a spoiled child who had never been thwarted in any desire, Giles seemed to assume that anything he wanted automatically became his.

"I could be misjudging him," she mused. "Buying a charm bracelet doesn't make him a criminal. I just wish there was some other way to see a sample of his handwriting without going on that plane ride!"

Mentally reviewing her brief conversation with Giles, Joyce considered his reaction to her mention of Miss Penrose. His facial expression had revealed nothing, but something he had said—"I didn't know she lived around here"—hadn't rung true. He had known Amy, and quite well too, judging from the bracelet he had given her. It certainly stood to reason that the girl would have mentioned her famous employer to him. Yet Giles apparently didn't know Miss Penrose, except through a purely literary association. It didn't make sense—unless he had something to hide.

The next forty-eight hours passed uneventfully, if slowly. With the library restored to its former condition, Joyce moved her desk and typewriter back into the room so as to be able to work more closely

with Miss Penrose. She finished the draft of Chapter 14 on Friday evening.

She phoned Barry to find out how he was feeling. He was better, he said, but would have to stay in for a few more days. Joyce was tempted to tell him all the news, but decided against it. Instead, she said, "Well, at least you can finish Howe"—and he said he would much rather see her.

By ten o'clock Saturday morning she felt that she had to find some way of occuping her mind or be driven to distraction by the merry-go-round whirl of questions which appeared to be unanswerable.

Browsing through the books which lined the library shelves, she chose a thriller set in Tangier and settled back in a chair. Then she noticed Amy's name on the flyleaf.

"Judging by the dog-eared pages, this must have been one of her favorites," Joyce observed.

And it proved to be just the sedative Joyce needed. International spies and veiled women flitted across the pages. She was nearing the halfway point of the book when she became aware of a series of small creases beneath some of the words. Puzzled, she attempted to link the words together into a sentence, but they made no sense. A few pages later the marks appeared again, both underlining random words and extending into the margin to form abstract geometrical designs.

"Was Amy in the habit of marking up her books?" Joyce asked Miss Penrose at luncheon. The tiny lines had really piqued her curiosity.

"Marking up? You mean like scribbling?" Miss Penrose asked. "No, I don't believe so. She did have one funny habit, though. Occasionally, when she found words or phrases she especially liked, she would score them with her fingernail. Amy always kept her nails long. I used to tease her about it sometimes, saying she was the only person I knew who could doodle without using a pen or pencil."

While they were on the subject of Amy, Joyce seized the opportunity to ask her employer if she had ever met Giles Stevenson. After a moment's thought, Miss Penrose replied that she had heard his name mentioned in connection with rush freight deliveries, but that she did not recall having come into personal contact with him. She was evidently unaware that he and her former secretary had been well acquainted.

"I don't believe he is very well known in Pirate's Cove," she concluded. "Ashville is a good bit larger, so naturally most of his business would come from there. The villagers around here are rather old-fashioned, you know. Truck delivery is fast enough for them."

Joyce casually mentioned that she had met Giles a few days before and had a date with the pilot the following afternoon. While she still did not wish to reveal her suspicions of Giles, she thought it wise to take a few precautions for her own safety. With her employer aware of her whereabouts, she would not be likely to "elope" as Amy had done.

After attending church with the other members of the household the next morning, Joyce changed

into sports clothes and got out a seldom-used shoulder-strap purse. It was old and definitely out of style, but concealed beneath its leather folds was a hidden compartment. Into this crevice she inserted the letter she had found in Amy's jacket.

"Now all I have to do is find a way to compare handwriting," she thought. "If they match—"

And what if they did match, she wondered. What then? But feeling her resolution begin to weaken, she brushed the problem aside. One bridge at a time was all she cared to cross.

Precisely at noon a screech of gravel beneath the wheels of a low-slung red sports car heralded Giles' arrival. Watching from an upstairs window, Joyce saw him spring jauntily out of the car and march up the front steps. It occurred to her that his flamboyant descent on Pinole Vista was hardly the action of a person who wished to remain unnoticed. For some reason this observation cleared away much of the dread with which she had been anticipating their date. She snatched up her purse and ran lightly down the stairs.

The sleek automobile moved swiftly off, responding instantly to the slightest direction from Giles. Instead of conventional exhaust pipes, it seemed to be equipped with jet boosters; and the fenders might have been a pair of stubby wings, so swiftly and smoothly did the car careen over the pavement.

After one dizzying glimpse, Joyce averted her eyes from the speedometer; but since the scenery was no more than a flashing blur, there seemed to be no place else to look. Each time her glance

wandered back to the dial the needle had climbed to a new height.

"You'd better slow those horses down to a gallop!" she cried over the engine's roar.

Obligingly, Giles eased his foot off the gas pedal. "Don't you like to get places?" he asked, his gray eyes filled with a half-humorous scorn at her timidity.

"Yes, but without any broken bones!"

"I thought the younger generation were all speed demons."

"I'm getting older by the minute," she murmured, under her breath.

The needle still hung at the peak of the speed limit prescribed by California law, but at least the buildings and trees along the wayside were now identifiable. In minutes they arrived at the fork in the road just beyond Serenity Gardens. Joyce recognized the left-hand route as the road she had driven to Ashville, but Giles swung to the right and drove on toward the sea.

"This is certainly a more convenient way of getting here than that old trail," she remarked. "I suppose they gave that back to nature when they built this road."

Giles maneuvered the car to the shoulder of the highway. "We'll have a short hike in to the hangar," he said. "Haven't been able to persuade the authorities to build me a private road."

The hangar was sheltered from the highway by a shady grove. Crossing a meadow bright with waving poppies, Joyce reflected that the location of

the airfield might have been purposely selected for reasons of camouflage. Not until she emerged from the trees could she see the ramshackle building and detect the break in the underbrush which served as a runway.

"Do you own this land?" she inquired curiously.

"Nope. Got permission from the owner to use it. Sort of a reciprocal trade agreement," Giles grinned. "He leases me the field for a very low rental, and I bring freight in for him."

Queenie stood in readiness on the makeshift runway, her gleaming propeller poised for flight. Giles assisted Joyce into the front passenger seat and indicated a safety belt which she was to use.

"There's cotton in that box on the dash," he added, jumping down and stooping to remove the chocks which blocked the wheels. "Better stuff your ears. Take-off is pretty noisy."

Joyce followed his suggestion, wadding bits of white fuzz into her ears and securing the safety belt around her waist. She watched in growing excitement as Giles gave the propeller a mighty spin. The engine caught, and he leaped in beside her.

"Do you have to clear with a tower or anything?" she asked.

"Not out here. We're pretty well away from the normal traffic patterns," he explained. "The closest airport is Monterey. For a short spin like this we don't need permission to go up." His hands flashed over the instruments, as *Queenie* shuddered from the might of her reverberating engine. "For a

longer trip, or one which would take me into established traffic patterns, I'd have to check with the C.A.A., and chart my course with the local towers along the route. Ready?"

"Roger!"

The pulsing throb drowned out all other sounds. The roar increased in a crescendo which battered its way behind the cotton stuffing and drummed through Joyce's head. Giles eased the stick forward; slowly, then with an accelerated swiftness, *Queenie* tore down the field. It seemed to Joyce, who was totally unused to taking such chances, that they would never clear the trees; but even as she formed the thought, the plane rose almost perpendicularly and they were air-borne.

"Wow!" she gulped. "Is it always that close?"

"Closer, sometimes," Giles laughed. "*Queenie's* on her best behavior today. Special treatment for company."

She plucked the cotton from her ears and watched the grove and the poppy meadow dwindle away beneath them as the plane gained altitude and then soared in a wide arc over the ocean.

"What's your cruising range?" She raised her voice, for the cabin was still far from quiet.

"Oh, a thousand miles or so. With extra gas tanks I could stretch it to twice that. Some single-engine planes have specially constructed wings to hold additional fuel. I've known fellows who've made it to Hawaii that way."

"I'll settle for a tour of the Monterey Peninsula!"

In her enthusiasm, it now seemed absurd that

she could have pictured the good-looking pilot as some sort of desperate character. From that lofty height she even stopped worrying about the letter concealed in the secret compartment of her purse. Joyce was enjoying herself too much to allow it to spoil her bird's-eye tour.

After a few minutes' climb, Giles leveled off and swung back toward the shore. Joyce tried with little success to identify several landmarks. Viewing things from a new perspective, she laughingly confessed that she had lost her bearings.

"Like to see how your house looks from up here?"

"Oh, I'd love to! Even if all the rooftops look the same, I'm sure I'd know Lee's landscaping," she predicted.

Giles altered his direction and descended a few hundred feet. With her eyes glued to the hilly terrain, Joyce suddenly pointed.

"There! My goodness, wouldn't Elizabeth have a shock if she could look up and see me now!"

He circled the house several times at a safe altitude, then completed the final loop, slackening speed and dropping even lower as he guided the plane back to her hangar. Joyce sat with her nose pressed against the window, taking in every bit of landscape the enlarged view afforded. A couple of minutes later they swooped low over Serenity Gardens.

"Oh dear, I hope we aren't disturbing the patients," she worried. "Look! There's one of them now, walking with a doctor."

Both the white-coated figure and his charge

glanced skyward as the plane passed very low overhead. The doctor appeared ordinary enough, but the patient standing beside him seemed to have no face. An instant later Joyce realized why: his entire head was swathed in bandages. Only slits for sight and ventilation were visible in the white wrappings.

"Isn't that peculiar!" she exclaimed. "I thought Serenity Gardens was just a rest home. That fellow looked—"

"—as if he had been badly burned," Giles finished the sentence for her. "I guess it takes a long time to recover from something like that."

"Oh, of course," Joyce said. "I hadn't thought of that."

Another three minutes brought them back to *Queenie's* home field. Skillfully, Giles maneuvered the plane, sinking ever lower and decreasing speed while he hovered over the runway. The landing was beautifully executed; scarcely a bump rocked the plane as they taxied up to the hangar.

"That was perfectly marvelous!" Joyce thanked him, hopping nimbly out of the cockpit.

"Better than bike riding?" Giles asked.

"Well, different anyway." Joyce was loath to admit that she had enjoyed the exhilarating plane ride more than an afternoon of pedaling with Barry.

Giles removed his helmet and smoothed his rumpled blond hair. "Want to take this inside and open us some Cokes?" He tossed the headgear to her and bent to chock the wheels.

Not until she had actually entered the hangar

did Joyce remember her original purpose in accepting Giles' invitation. Feeling slightly guilty, she slid the letter out of her purse and, with a backward glance, hurried to the worktable in a badly lit corner of the hangar.

A battered ledger lay half-concealed under some oil-spattered rags on the table. Joyce took a deep breath. Here was her chance either to clear Giles of all complicity in Amy's "elopement" or to involve him even more deeply. She was strangely reluctant to open the ledger; it seemed like a betrayal of confidence after he had treated her to such an exciting experience as the ride in *Queenie*. But, she reasoned, if a glimpse of his handwriting would exonerate him—

Hesitating no longer, she flipped open the ledger. Words sprawled across the page, and even before her eyes traveled back to the unfolded letter Joyce knew that she had found the answer she was seeking.

The handwriting was identical.

TEN

She had no doubt at all that the letter and the ledger entry had been written by the same person. The ink, the formation of the letters, the slight downhill slope of the lines—all were identical.

Joyce stared unseeingly at the script for thirty seconds or so, lost in thought, until the crunch of heavy boots brought her to her senses. In one motion she thrust Amy's letter back into her purse and shut the ledger, shoving it under the oily rags. She whirled to retreat from the worktable, but Giles was standing at the door of the hangar, regarding her with an icy calmness. "What are you doing down there?" he demanded.

"He couldn't. have seen," Joyce told herself, knowing that one false move now might plunge her into a disastrous situation. He body had blocked his view of the worktable; it was only suspicion on his part which had led to the abrupt question.

"Looking for the Coke machine, of course," she

replied. "You seem to have it well hidden. Is there a light switch down this way?"

"Right above your head," Giles said, moving forward to jerk the chain. Electric light flooded over the table. His eyes flicked rapidly about, taking in the helmet which she had set on a toolbox, and lingering, it seemed to Joyce, just a trifle too long on the rag-covered ledger.

For a full, heart-stopping minute he held the pose, before apparently deciding that nothing had been disarranged. "Should have told you where the cooler was," he apologized, placing an arm about her shoulders and guiding her to the other side of the hangar. "I'll bet you were looking for one of those big red contraptions. Here we are."

He bent to open a small refrigeration unit and uncapped a pair of bottles.

"Um, that's good," Joyce exclaimed, grateful for the liquid coursing down her dry throat. She focused her attention on the bottle, feeling the numbness of her muscles begin to ease. Although outwardly controlled, she had experienced a terrific scare. It had, she decided, been entirely too close for comfort. Had she delayed a second longer—

"What made you decide to settle in Ashville?" Giles' arm had found its way around her shoulders again, and Joyce chose the first subject which popped into her mind in the hope of diverting his thoughts away from herself. "I'm surprised anyone who flies as well as you do isn't working for one of the big airlines."

"I had enough regimentation in the Navy," he

said disparagingly. "Do this, do that; yes sir, no sir! Not me, thanks. I like to be free—not tied to a schedule. Besides, I wouldn't trade *Queenie* for the fastest jet made."

"She's certainly a beautiful—" Joyce began, when the phone rang. The shrill, insistent peals echoed through the hangar.

"Excuse me." With an agility surprising in a person of his size, Giles crossed the room and cut short the demanding summons.

Careful to display no interest in the conversation, Joyce neverthless strained her ears.

"I know, I know," Giles was saying. "No harm done. I didn't think you'd be—What?" And then, in an injured tone, "I tell you it's all right. Okay, I'll be there."

He slammed the receiver back into the cradle. Joyce turned expectantly as he rejoined her, and wondered at the blackness of his expression.

"The old tyrant!" he muttered.

"Business?" Joyce inquired.

"Well, yes, you might call it that." Giles scowled at the telephone. "I had the evening all planned, too. Dinner and dancing at the best place in Ashville."

Secretly relieved, Joyce murmured that she understood. She did not think that she could have got through an entire evening with him without involuntarily revealing the suspicion she felt.

They retraced their steps across the meadow where the red sports car was parked. Gradually Giles' ill-humor abated, but he said little during the ride and drove at a reckless speed. Once he was

forced to swerve and jam on the brakes to avoid ramming into another car. Joyce threw out her arms, bracing herself for the collision. Her purse hurtled to the floor; when she opened her eyes again, surprised to be still alive, she saw that the sudden jar had spilled coins, lipstick, and comb over the floorboards.

"Please, Giles, I—I'm not in that much of a hurry," she pleaded, after he had exchanged insults with the driver of the other auto and set the sports car to jouncing over the road once again.

Without comment, he decreased his speed. Joyce, gathering up her scattered possessions, vowed to herself that this would be the last time she would ever set foot in an automobile with Giles Stevenson at the wheel.

She could have fallen out and kissed the ground when he pulled into the driveway at Pinole Vista. What a relief to get home! She thanked him again for the day's outing, and murmured a vague reply to his suggestion of another date. Finally, with an impatient glance at his wristwatch, he promised to telephone her. The sports car pivoted, and was soon lost in a cloud of dust as it tore back down the road.

"I think I'll go to my room and have a quiet nervous breakdown," Joyce shuddered.

What a day it had been! But despite the five or ten years subtracted from her life by the break-neck rides, she was glad that she had gone. Now not only did she have the charm bracelet as proof that Giles had known Amy Dekker, but she also had

the knowledge that the letter which had lured the girl away had come from him. She felt sure that the identification of the handwriting would prove to be a giant step toward the solution of the mystery.

"Oh! Joyce, dear," Miss Penrose called to her as she passed the living room. "Did you have a nice time?"

"I saw a lot of the countryside," Joyce temporized.

"Good. You should get out more. It's a shame you missed Barry, though. I told him he ought to have called before pedaling up, but he's so impulsive—wouldn't even stay for luncheon."

"Did you tell him I had gone with Giles?"

"Yes." Seeing the crestfallen look on Joyce's face, Miss Penrose added, "Well, he asked, and I didn't think it would do any harm to let him know that another eligible young man had set his sights on you. A little healthy jealousy is good for a romance."

Joyce smiled weakly. If she knew Barry, his reaction wouldn't have been healthy jealousy, it would have been a slow burn!

She hastened to her room, where she exchanged her sports clothes for a cool linen dress. Then she picked up the hall extension phone and dialed Barry's number.

"Did you have a nice joyride?" he asked, upon hearing her voice.

"Don't be sarcastic," she countered. "I've found out something important."

His tone changed. "About Amy?"

"Yes." Suddenly she remembered Elizabeth once

complaining about the gossips with whom they shared the party line. "It's better not to talk over the phone," she cautioned. "Could you possibly come up this evening?"

"Sure. I'll borrow the car and buzz up around seven."

"I'll be waiting at the head of the driveway. I want to talk this over with you before saying anything to Miss Penrose."

"You'll know me by the hibiscus in my buttonhole," Barry quipped, and rang off.

The three hours before their appointment seemed endless to Joyce. Elizabeth had dinner preparations already under way, *Witch's Wind* was typed up to date, and even the Sunday newspaper failed to command her interest. In an effort to forget the lagging hands of the clock, she got out her entire wardrobe of shoes and attacked them with polish and buffer.

At last dinner came to an end. Joyce dried the dishes; then, leaving Miss Penrose and Elizabeth comfortably seated before the television set, she took up her purse and slipped out the kitchen door. A ten-minute walk brought her to the spot where the driveway intersected the public road and there, parked off to the left, was Barry in the green sedan.

"Hop in," he invited, holding open the door.

"Have I got news for you!" A jumbled sequence of words rushed out, until Barry, holding up a hand in protest, begged her to begin over again.

This time she managed to tell the story coherently. Starting with her discovery of the charm bracelet and letter, she detailed her experiences with the

jeweler in Ashville and her subsequent meeting with Giles Stevenson.

"I almost fainted when he came up behind me," she confessed sheepishly. "I was sure he could read my mind."

"Did you ask him about the bracelet?" Barry inquired eagerly.

"No, I was going to but—well, I was waiting for the right opportunity. Then, after he said he didn't know Miss Penrose lived in this vicinity, I realized he wouldn't admit it anyway and decided that my mention of Amy might scare him off for good. So when he asked me to go on that plane ride, I accepted. And it's a good thing I did!"

Breathlessly, she told him how she had compared the handwriting in Giles' ledger with the letter she had found in Amy's jacket.

"He nearly caught me at it," she said, shivering at the recollection. "If he hadn't been wearing those noisy boots, I wouldn't have heard him in time."

"What ever possessed you to take such a chance?" Barry demanded. "Don't you know you could get into trouble that way?"

"I do now!"

"Let me see that letter."

Joyce fished in her purse. Barry waited while she rummaged through all the paraphernalia. Impatiently at first, then with growing apprehension, Joyce emptied the contents of the purse into her lap.

"It's gone!"

"Could you have dropped it in the hangar?"

She shook her head miserably. "I don't know—I

don't think so. One of us would have noticed it. Oh! The car! We almost had an accident," she explained. "Giles came within two inches of ramming into another car, and my purse slid off the seat. I forgot all about the letter when I was picking things up."

"Does he have a convertible?"

"Yes. It could have blown out, I suppose. I had my eyes closed part of the time, so I may have missed seeing it go. What a bad break! That was the only thing we had which definitely linked Giles to Amy. And now it's gone."

"I hope it's gone," Barry said meaningfully. "Much better to have it lost in the shrubbery somewhere than lodged under the seat, where he may find it." Seeing her stricken look, he took her hand and drew her closer. "Now, don't get upset. You've got more courage than any girl I ever knew. It really took gumption to search through his papers, knowing that he might be a—a kidnaper."

His admiring words helped to restore Joyce's self-confidence. Even if Giles should discover the letter in his car, she reasoned, he would probably assume that Amy had dropped it there weeks ago.

"If he did kidnap Amy, where do you suppose he's holding her?" she puzzled. "She isn't in the hangar, I'm sure. He would never have taken the chance that I might see or hear her if she were there."

"The same would hold true for his apartment, or wherever he lives," Barry agreed. "He's bound to have a landlady who might decide to inspect the water pipes or something." He thought for a

moment. "You said he received a phone call while you were there. What did he talk about?"

Joyce wrinkled her nose in an effort to recollect Giles' brief conversation. "Not too awfully much," she admitted. "It sounded to me as if he were trying to reassure the person on the other end about something. He kept saying 'It's all right,' and I think he said 'No harm done.' Then he promised to go somewhere. I asked him if it was business, and he said, 'You might call it that.' I can't remember exactly, but that's about it."

"Probably was business," Barry conceded. "But if he is working outside the law, it's just possible that he has an accomplice. The other person could be worried that he might get too friendly with you and maybe spill the beans about their activities."

"But how would this other person know I was there?"

"Beats me. This affair gets more mysterious all the time. The more we find out, the less we know."

"There is one thing we could check on," Joyce suggested. "I asked him if he owned the land where he keeps his plane, and he said he leased it on a trade agreement. He carries a lot of freight for the owner of the land in return for being allowed to park the plane there."

"Good girl! Then if Stevenson is up to no good, the landowner would be the logical accomplice. He didn't say what sort of freight he carried, did he?"

"No, I'm sure he didn't mention anything specific."

"That should be easy enough to find out," Barry said. "Once we know the owner's name, we can

check on what sort of business he's in. Say, I've got an idea! Uncle Elwood is a real pal of the county assessor. They play chess together. I'll ask him to do a little discreet asking around for us."

Joyce enthusiastically agreed that this was a sound proposal. "We still haven't furnished Giles with any motive for wanting to kidnap Amy," she fretted, after they had discussed the best way to approach Barry's uncle.

"The only thing I can think of is smuggling—bringing something into the country without going through the customs formalities. She might have found out about it, and he had to make sure she wouldn't tell what she knew. Uncle Sam would be mighty interested if we could discover anything to back up our suspicions."

"Yes, that would come under federal jurisdiction, wouldn't it? Tax evasion, for one thing. You know, I still can't get it out of my mind that this has some connection with *Witch's Wind.*"

"That gasoline can could have come from the hangar—planes use high-octane fuel," Barry remarked. "By the way, I asked Aunt Lu if she knew who used the phone the night of the meeting. She didn't."

Joyce sighed at the complexity of it all. "It's enough to make me want to bat my head against the wall!"

"And dent that pretty skull? I won't hear of it." Barry coiled a finger around one of her long tresses.

"Well, you must admit it's very exasperating," she laughed.

"Think of it as a trial which has brought us closer together."

Joyce met his eyes. Usually Barry employed a light, bantering tone, but there was no trace of humor now visible in his expression.

"I wish you'd try to forget about this mystery and stick to your typing," he said. "It was all right at first, before we knew what was going on, but now it looks as if we've run across something that—that isn't funny. I don't want anything to happen to you, Joyce."

"What could happen to me?"

"What happened to Amy?" he countered. "Today, when Miss Penrose said you'd gone flying with Stevenson, it dawned on me how very fond I am of you."

Joyce's heart thudded against her ribs, and she knew that never in a million years could Giles Stevenson affect her in this strange manner.

"We can't quit now," she whispered. "We're so close to finding out about Amy."

"We will—somehow or other," he promised, his fingers tightening on her shoulder. "But you've got to promise you'll stay off the target range. You aren't going to bait the trap for Stevenson."

The evening shadows fell across his face as he bent toward her. His lips touched hers, lighter than a caressing breeze, then drew back as a car turned into the lane.

Joyce recognized Lee as the driver of the battered

station wagon. The gardener raised his hand in greeting and drove past, but the breathless quality of the moment had been shattered.

"I will be careful, Barry," she promised. "Though it might be fun to be a damsel in distress. Then you could rescue me."

"Any more talk of that kind, and I'll find a ball and chain for you. That way at least I'd know you weren't running around with an airplane jockey." He considered this notion for a few seconds as though it might, after all, be a good idea. Then he grew serious again. "Can you remember anything of what was written in that ledger?"

"No—I really only looked to compare the handwriting." Joyce puckered her brow. "Does the word 'Dachrest' mean anything to you? I remember looking closely at that because the beginning of it was the same as the 'Darling' written in the letter."

" 'Dachrest'? No. It sounds like the name of a place or person." Barry was evidently disappointed. "It would have been nice if you'd seen something juicy—like 'opium.' "

"Or 'diamonds.' No, there was nothing like that. All I could find out about Giles' background is that he served a hitch in the Navy and isn't keen on regimentation." Joyce turned to him for advice. "Should we tell Miss Penrose what we suspect?"

"Not so long as it's still just suspicion," Barry advised. "No sense in worrying her needlessly. With any luck, Uncle Elwood can ferret out the name of the landowner, and then we'll have a second front opened up. I have a feeling that Stevenson is more or

less just a middleman in their racket. Somebody much more important is behind it all."

He turned the ignition key and guided the car up the driveway to the front steps. "Remember your promise, now," he cautioned. "No more fly-boy. It isn't safe."

"It certainly isn't," Joyce laughed. "He drives like a maniac!"

Returning the light pressure of his fingers, she slid out of the car. Barry promised to call her the moment any news broke; then, with a wave of his hand, he was gone.

Miss Penrose and Elizabeth were still watching television when she entered the house. They did not inquire as to her absence, nor did she mention it, feeling that by saying nothing she would run no risk of the wrong words popping out. Barry was right, she decided, watching their absorbed faces. There was no cause to burden them with a lot of suspicions.

She sat down on a corner of the couch and tried to sort out her jumbled emotions. It had been days since she had found time to dwell on purely personal feelings. Her growing anxiety about Amy Dekker and speculation about Giles, the fire, and the destroyed manuscript had all but blotted out the romantic thoughts about Barry which she had entertained in the first days after meeting him.

Just thinking about Barry sent a warm glow pulsing through her veins. Although she had dated numerous young men since high school days, she had never been seriously attracted to anyone before

coming to Pirate's Cove. From the first she had thought Barry unique, and as time passed she had become more and more impressed with his thoughtfulness and his merry approach to life. She knew that, given time, her liking for him could deepen into something more permanent than friendship.

In a sentimental half-daze she heard Miss Penrose announce that she was for bed.

Elizabeth made her customary tour of the doors and windows, more vigilant than ever since the fire. Joyce assured the housekeeper that she would see to the lights, saying that she wanted to watch another show or two before going up.

But as it turned out, her evening of television viewing came to an abrupt end. About twenty minutes after Elizabeth had rustled up the stairs, the telephone buzzed. Joyce hurried to answer it before its shrill peals awakened the rest of the household.

"Hello, Miss Penrose?" a guarded, almost inaudible voice inquired when she lifted the receiver.

"I'm sorry, she has retired for the night," Joyce replied, in her best private-secretary manner. "May I take a message?"

There was a pause, during which she distinguished a muffled sob from the other end of the wire.

"I—I must talk to her," the voice persisted. "It's urgent! Tell her that Amy—"

"Amy!" Joyce exclaimed. "Amy Dekker?"

"Yes. Oh, please—she must help me! I've been—"

"Hello? Hello?" Joyce cried frantically.

But the voice on the other end was still, and after a wretched moment Joyce heard a faint click.

The line went dead.

ELEVEN

JOYCE jiggled the receiver, desperately trying to re-establish the connection; but as she had feared, the only response was the monotonous hum of the dial tone. She was still staring blankly at the receiver when a door on the second floor opened and a triangle of light fell across the stairs.

"Is it for me?" Miss Penrose called, knotting the cord of her robe as she emerged into the hall.

"Yes, but she's hung up," Joyce answered. She replaced the receiver in sudden decision. The time had come when Miss Penrose had to know what was going on.

"I was just drifting off to sleep when I heard the phone," Miss Penrose said as she came down the stairs. "Who was it, dear?"

"Amy Dekker," Joyce said. "Please come in and sit down. I must talk with you."

Wearing a puzzled frown, Miss Penrose seated herself on the couch. "Amy—at this time of night? I don't understand."

"Amy's in trouble," Joyce said quietly. "We suspected it before, and now I'm certain that she is being held prisoner."

All traces of sleep vanished from the author's face. "I take it by 'we' you mean you and Barry. I think you had better tell me what's been happening," she said, just as quietly. "The phone call first. Exactly what did she say?"

Word for word, because it had been a very short conversation, Joyce repeated Amy's message.

"Yes, it appears that you were right," Miss Penrose agreed soberly. "Before you give me any more of the details, I think we had better see if we can't trace that call."

She marched to the phone, and Joyce was once again struck by the change in her employer. Crises seemed to bring out the best in Miss Penrose.

"Central," that lady was saying, "this is Millicent Penrose. A call came through on this line a few moments ago. Can you tell me what number it came from?" She listened briefly. "Then would you know if it was a long-distance call?" There was a lengthier pause this time, before she said, "Thank you, Doris. No, it can't be helped," and hung up.

"Any luck?" Joyce asked anxiously.

"None. At night there is only the one local operator on duty. All calls are routed through the dial system. Even if it had come long-distance, we would have to know the city or origin before it could be traced." Looking disappointed, but not depressed, she sat down again. "Now. Supposing you tell me what you young people have been

doing that you didn't want me to know about."

"It wasn't that," Joyce protested. "We just had a—a feeling that something was wrong. After the fire I thought there might be some connection with *Witch's Wind.* Then when we read the manuscript, both you and Barry were sure I was on the wrong track, and—well, there didn't seem to be anything we could do. So I tried to forget it, and nearly succeeded until the day I found Amy's books and asked you if I might look at her other things."

"Yes, I remember. You told me you hadn't found an address book."

"I didn't. It was something else."

For the second time in the space of a few hours Joyce recounted her discovery of the letter and charm bracelet in Amy's jacket pocket. Having already told the story to Barry, she was able to detail her experiences without much hesitation.

"Giles Stevenson," Miss Penrose murmured. "I wonder how Amy first happened to meet him. She was such a shy little thing."

"She might have come across the hangar while out for a hike," Joyce guessed. "It's not more than a couple of miles from here, though that overgrown old road makes it seem farther."

"It's all so puzzling," the writer fretted. "I can't help feeling that I am to blame. I should have called the police when Amy first disappeared."

"You couldn't have known she was in danger. These people have been very clever at hiding their tracks. That elopement note was just the thing to lull any suspicion you might have had." Joyce sighed.

"If only we knew what was behind it all. What could Amy have learned that would force them to take such drastic measures?"

"At least she is still alive and, I hope, well," Miss Penrose said thankfully. "My dear, this places us in a terrible quandary. The police must be notified at once!"

"Giles Stevenson is our only lead," Joyce said, absently tracing her finger over the upholstery designs. "They could arrest him on suspicion of kidnaping, but I doubt that they could persuade him to confess to anything." She conjured up a mental picture of Giles smiling mockingly at the police force, daring them to produce some evidence against him. "Without proof, they couldn't hold him very long, and in the meantime his accomplices would be alerted. They might have no scruples about doing away with Amy if they felt that keeping her prisoner would jeopardize their own safety."

Miss Penrose paced the floor in agitation. "When Elwood Norris learns who owns the land—what then?"

"Then we will go to the police," Joyce assured her. "But we must avoid acting prematurely. As soon as we have a reasonable idea of where Amy is being held, we can turn all our information over to the authorities. Then they can arrest Giles and his accomplices simultaneously, without giving them time to harm Amy."

"How I wish I could share your confidence!" Miss Penrose lamented. "That poor child is depending

on us. If anything happens to her, I'll never forgive myself!"

"Amy is going to be all right," Joyce said, with a faith she was far from feeling. "A couple of days from now she'll be safely home."

A couple of days—would they be given that much time, she wondered, when her employer had at last been persuaded to return to bed. The hands of the clock seemed to be pitted against them; already it was past midnight. Too late to call Barry now, although she was eager to have his opinion on the matter. Doubt assailed her once again. Perhaps Miss Penrose was right: perhaps if the police understood the situation— She groaned in disgust and switched off the light. It was too late really to do anything except try to compose herself for sleep and pray that, with Mr. Norris' help, they would succeed in finding Amy Dekker—in time.

Joyce awoke feeling oppressed. The bedclothes and pillows were in wild disarray. Her sleep had been riddled by a series of lurid dreams which continued to haunt her long after she had showered and dressed. Their very vagueness seemed sinister, even in the bright morning light. Miserably, Joyce tried to recall one nightmare especially, and with an effort succeeded in bringing to mind Amy's sobbing voice. The voice had been prominent in the nightmare, she remembered, serving as sort of a sound track for a horror-movie scene in which Giles Stevenson swooped batlike down at her. She knew it was Giles because of his size, although his features

had been covered by a white mask; whether that had any significance or not she couldn't decide. Upon being called to breakfast, she endeavored to dismiss the nightmare and concentrate on the day ahead.

She was appalled at Miss Penrose's appearance. The writer's face was haggard, and she had dark circles under her eyes. She confessed that she had slept very little. Once again she brought up the advisability of notifying the police.

"Let me talk to Barry first and see what he thinks," Joyce pleaded.

"Go ahead," Miss Penrose agreed after a long pause. "But I think that if nothing new has turned up by this evening we ought to call Chief Mullins. I can't take the responsibility for Amy's life."

Relieved, now that she had finally confided in her employer, Joyce asked permission to use the station wagon. She sent the car spinning down the hill to Pirate's Cove, but hesitated at the outskirts of the village, wondering where to look first for Barry. She decided that there was a good chance of finding him at the library. Accordingly she drove in that direction, and parked behind a swanky limousine at the entrance to the building.

Zinnia Fisher sat at the desk, telephone in hand. She smiled at Joyce, and the girl waved back as she hurried by. She found Barry at the corner table, bent over a stack of papers. He looked up and grinned at her approach.

"How do you expect me to keep Clinton and

Howe apart when you're here to distract my attention?" he demanded, in mock anger.

"Sorry—this really is important." Joyce pulled up a chair. She was about to embark on a recital of the newest developments when a book thudded to the floor a few feet away.

"Oops! Didn't mean to disturb you," Iris Hale apologized, stooping to retrieve the volume.

The blond girl looked exceptionally attractive in a smart white uniform and high-heeled white sandals. "This is my biggest weekly job," she explained, gesturing toward her armload of books. "Picking out enough stuff for everybody to read. I'm not at all sure Miss Fisher approves of my taking out so many at one time."

"Oh, you've got Zinnia all wrong," said Barry. "She's all for an increase in circulation."

Watching Iris move gracefully along the shelves, Joyce frowned. Either Iris bore an amazing resemblance to some other person, or she had known the girl before. Of course, she reminded herself, she had been introduced to her at the Cultural Society meeting, but she was certain that the brief encounter was not enough to inspire the feeling of familiarity which the girl's appearance evoked.

"No, she looks like somebody else I know," Joyce decided, after mulling over the idea a trifle longer. But although she cast her memory back over her college friends and other people she had met, she was unable to make a connection. She remembered reading that everyone had a double somewhere in the world, and wondered whether by some fantastic

coincidence she had run across Iris' face on another person.

She watched the blond girl staggering a bit under the weight of fifteen or twenty books, as she carried her load to the check-out desk. A few moments later Iris fluttered a hand in the direction of Barry's table and clattered out.

"Are you here because my devastating good looks draw you like a magnet or because your boss wants some dope for her book?" Barry inquired jestingly.

"Neither." Joyce glanced back at the desk, making sure that Miss Fisher was not paying undue attention to their low conversation. "We got a telephone call last night from Amy Dekker."

Barry nearly shot out of his chair. "What? Where is she?"

"Shhh! I don't know where she is. Somebody cut her off before she could tell me. But she's in a jam, all right. She kept saying that we had to help her."

At Barry's insistence, Joyce repeated the brief telephone conversation. "I had to tell Miss Penrose about it," she added. "She tried to trace the call, but that was impossible, and now she is determined to call in the police. I'm afraid she's right, too. We can't keep this thing to ourselves much longer."

"What! The first thing they'll do is arrest Stevenson, and then that girl *will* be in trouble!"

"Did you ask your uncle to talk to the county assessor?" she asked, knowing that it was futile to debate on the wisdom of Miss Penrose's decision.

"Yes, he's gone over there this morning. We'll know today who owns that land."

"If that's the case, then the police can—"

She broke off, interrupted by an annoyed exclamation from Miss Fisher. "The nerve of those people!" the librarian cried. "Defacing brand-new books. Just wait until that girl comes in again. I'll tell her!"

"What's the trouble, Zinnia?" Barry called. "Has someone been cutting your books into paper dolls?"

Miss Fisher's usually placid face was flushed with annoyance. "No, it's this. Somebody used a pin to scribble all over the margins. The very idea!" She flipped the pages unhappily. "Here it is again. What a silly thing for a grown person to do!"

"May I see that, Miss Fisher?" Joyce asked, moving quickly to the desk.

Shoving the book across to the girl, the librarian continued to mutter. Joyce turned the pages with unsteady fingers. Miss Fisher's description of the damage had roused a memory of another book which she had examined recently. It was just possible that. . . .

The pin marks, as Miss Fisher had called them, were in the form of abstract geometrical designs scattered about the margins. Peering closely at the page, Joyce caught sight of faint lines underscoring a half-dozen words or so.

"Miss Fisher," she said, trying to control her excitement, "do you think these pinpricks could have been in this book before it went to the sanitarium?"

"Oh no," answered Miss Fisher. "We've only had the book a month, and that was its first check out."

"Thank you," Joyce said. "Thank you very much."

Swiftly she turned back to the table where Barry was regarding the proceedings with amusement. "Are you out to solve the mystery of Jack-the-Book-Ripper?" he grinned.

"No, I'm not." A secretive smile played across her lips. "But I *am* going to solve the mystery of Amy Dekker. I know where she is!"

TWELVE

"Okay, what's the joke?" Barry demanded, stretching his long legs out to fit under the dashboard of the station wagon. "Five minutes ago we hadn't a ghost of an idea where to start looking. Now you say you know where to find Amy Dekker."

"I do," Joyce replied, with maddening calmness. "Five minutes ago I hadn't seen that marked-up book."

Seeing that he was about to explode with mingled curiosity and exasperation, she dropped her superior tone and laughed. "Sorry. I couldn't resist flaunting my Sherlock Holmes abilities. You see, when Miss Fisher started complaining about those pin marks, it reminded me of an odd habit of Amy's. She doodled with her fingernails."

Barry stared. "Oh, come on, tell me something I can believe!"

"It's true! The other night I was reading a book of hers—she left a lot of them at the house. I came across some peculiar little lines under a few of the

words, and later on a bunch of hieroglyphics in the margin. Miss Penrose said that Amy always did that—she used her fingernails like some people use a pencil. I guess it was sort of a nervous habit. Instead of biting her nails she doodled with them."

"But even so, couldn't she have marked up that book months ago?"

"No, because it's brand-new. The book has been in the library less than a month, and no one has taken it out, Miss Fisher says, except Iris Hale. I'm sure Amy must be at Serenity Gardens!"

"A sanitarium would make a perfect hiding spot," Barry admitted.

"Sure it would. It's secluded, with plenty of keepers around to see that she doesn't escape—why it's ideal!" Joyce wrinkled her nose. "I wish we knew what else they have to hide, though. There must be a connection between the sanitarium and Giles Stevenson—some illegal activity."

"People are going to find that mighty hard to swallow," Barry reminded her. "Serenity Gardens is nationally famous. It's listed as one of the top rest homes in the country. With all the money they've got backing them, I can't see why they should suddenly go into the kidnaping trade."

"Neither can I, but I'll bet Amy knows." Joyce opened the glove compartment and took out a pair of sunglasses. "How would you like to go for another picnic in the country?"

Barry groaned in mock consternation. "Oh, all right. Anything to keep you happy. But I warn you—George isn't going to like this!"

"George?"

"Washington. The father of our country, the cherry-pie industry, and numerous other honorable institutions. When he sees how much time I'm giving Clinton and Howe to gang up on him—"

"Barry, one of these days you're going to finish that thesis, and then you'll have nothing to keep your mind occupied," Joyce giggled.

"There'll always be you," he said complacently. "And my Ph.D. dissertation. I'll have to finish that, of course, before I can graduate from instructor to professor."

"Holy mackerel!" cried Joyce with some impatience. In her opinion, too much time had already been wasted. She put the car in gear and drove quickly to the Norris house, keeping the motor running while Barry hopped out. A moment later he reappeared with his bicycle, which he lifted into the wagon's rear compartment.

Miss Penrose, they learned from Elizabeth, was in the study. The housekeeper reported that her mistress had been attempting to work out the concluding chapters of *Witch's Wind,* and added that, in her opinion, things weren't going too well for the writer.

"Papers flying all over the place!" she grumbled.

Joyce was just as happy to find that her employer was safely occupied, knowing that if Miss Penrose were to gain a hint of Amy's whereabouts she would insist upon immediate action by the authorities. Joyce wanted an opportunity to explore Serenity Gardens first. While she was fairly certain that they

had at last succeeded in locating the girl, she felt that an exploratory foray into the sanitarium grounds might tell them much. As Barry bluntly stated it, they were going to "case the place."

Hastily spreading sandwiches, she paused to drop some eggs into boiling water. "Elizabeth," she asked, "what did Amy Dekker look like?"

"Oh, she was a little mite of a thing. Hardly came up to my shoulder. She had long black hair, braided usually. I was always tempted to call her Pocahontas. Big brown eyes. Here, I'll cut you some chocolate cake to take along. Fresh-baked this morning." She stopped, in the act of tearing out a sheet of waxed paper. "Why are you so interested in Amy?"

"I've heard a great deal about her, but nobody ever mentioned what she looked like. I just wondered," Joyce explained lamely. "Thanks, Elizabeth, that's more than enough. We'll be back before dinnertime."

The air was oppressively still as they pedaled along the driveway and made the turn onto the public thoroughfare. Not a trace of a breeze skimmed over the bushes to rustle their shiny foliage, and to Joyce's ears even the birds seemed strangely quiet, as though they were reserving their songs for a brighter day.

The tension in the air was not entirely due to her imagination. Barry noticed it too.

"Wouldn't be surprised if we had a storm," he commented, squinting at the sky.

Joyce followed his gaze. The heavens were tinted

a luminous pearl-gray, and she could not quite repress the thought that the turn in the weather seemed like some sort of omen, but what it foreboded she could not tell.

"We've found the answer to one of our puzzles, anyway," she remarked. "If Amy is being held captive at Serenity Gardens, that means that Iris Hale made the telephone call from your house."

Barry looked glum. "It's hard to believe," he declared. Iris mixed up in something as fishy as this." He mulled over the problem for a time. "That brings us right back to where we started—to *Witch's Wind.* That book *has* to be involved, or nothing makes sense."

Joyce confessed that she had lost track of the number of times she had reread the first chapter of the manuscript, and added that, as far as she was concerned, nothing made much sense anyway.

They cycled along in silence, and not long afterward rounded the bend of the road which brought them to within sight of the nursing home.

"There should be a little path leading around to the rear grounds," Joyce said. She tried to recall the exact spot where it branched off, but her one view of it had been from the air, and the plane had passed over it too swiftly to allow more than a quick glimpse.

Nevertheless, they decided to take their chances. The spacious front grounds were completely deserted. No one appeared to challenge their presence, and without much searching they found the pebble-strewn lane which Joyce had remembered. It curved

in a leisurely arc, never quite taking them out of sight of the building, but weaving far enough afield so that they felt reasonably safe from observation. They pedaled over a narrow footbridge which crossed a sluggish stream, and presently found the path coiling inward again. Past a greenhouse and well-cultivated rose garden they rode, and emerged abruptly onto the grassy terrace where the path ended.

They braked to a stop. A trio of elderly patients reclined in lounge chairs, but either they were asleep or did not heed the arrival of the newcomers.

"We could fake an accident," Joyce suggested dubiously. "If I were to pretend that my ankle was sprained, they might invite us in."

Barry vetoed the idea with a shake of his head. "A doctor would know in a minute that there was nothing wrong with your ankle. Anything phony would only arouse their suspicions."

"Guess you're right." Joyce was beginning to feel that the expedition had been a waste of time. The old people showed absolutely no interest in their presence, and no keepers had rushed out to forbid their entry. Serenity Gardens seemed, if possible, even more peaceful than its name.

"Me and my harebrained schemes," she muttered under her breath.

Before Barry had time to dispute this opinion, a short, pudgy man wearing a white jacket came briskly into view. His companion, though taller by some inches, appeared to find it difficult to keep pace with the doctor's rapid gait. They seemed to

be having a heated conversation; and while they were still too distant for Joyce to overhear any of their words, she gained the impression that they were not on good terms.

Putting on a sudden burst of speed, the taller man grasped the doctor's arm. "I'll leave when I'm ready, and no sooner!" he exclaimed in a resonant voice. "I paid you—"

With a definite sense of shock, Joyce saw that the man's face was swathed in bandages. This must be the patient she had seen from the air!

The doctor silenced him with a curt command and a gesture signifying that they were not alone. The sight of Joyce and Barry perched a few yards away had a visible effect on the patient. He wheeled, and while not quite running, managed to leave the terrace in an astonishingly short time.

"Antisocial," Barry observed.

"Bet the doctor is too," Joyce returned. "Look, here he comes!"

The doctor's fat little legs propelled him furiously across the lawn.

"You haff trespassed on private property," he informed them icily. "Zis is a hospital, not a picnic ground."

His barely perceptible accent gave heightened emphasis to this proclamation. Joyce decided on the spot that anyone who said all fat men were jolly had yet to meet this obese dragon. His puffy cheeks looked as if they would crack if strained by a smile, and his small, hooded eyes were utterly without humor.

"We're so sorry," she apologized charmingly, knowing as she did so that the effort was wasted. "Are you Dr. Smithers?"

"I am Dr. Van der Lys. There is no Smithers here."

"We must have been misinformed," Barry acknowledged. "Sorry if we disturbed anyone."

Joyce scarcely heard him. Her full attention was riveted on the third-floor window which had suddenly framed a girl's face—a pale, forlorn face outlined by jet-black braids. The girl waved frantically, trying to attract attention. It was fortunate that Barry had spoken at that moment, for Dr. Van der Lys turned his cold gaze on the young man and thus failed to see Joyce's startled look.

The face vanished as quickly as it had appeared. Keeping her wits about her, Joyce fixed the location of the window firmly in her mind and then glanced quickly away, hoping that she would be able to keep her voice steady.

"You have a beautiful setting here, Doctor," she said. "The rose garden we passed was magnificent."

Obviously Dr. Van der Lys had no intention of prolonging the discussion. "You may admire it again as you leave," he said. "Good day."

"Good day," Barry echoed, and Joyce parroted the phrase as she swung her bicycle in the reverse direction. She did not risk a glance over her shoulder, but something told her that the doctor would hold his ground until he was certain they had left the premises.

"The plot thickens," Barry said, *sotto voce.*

"It's positively gluey! Oh, Barry, we were right.

Did you—did you happen to look up at the third floor?"

"I saw Pocahontas, if that's what you're referring to. You certainly pulled that one out of the bag," he said admiringly.

"Out of the book, you mean. Bless Amy's fingernails! And now," Joyce said, "I think it's time we had a nice long talk with a policeman."

It was a jubilant threesome that hastened up the steps of the Ashville Police Station an hour and a half later. Upon their return to Pinole Vista, Joyce and Barry had been met by an agitated Miss Penrose, who demanded to know where they had been. Elizabeth, she said, had told her of Joyce's inquiry about Amy's appearance, and she had feared they would do something foolhardy. They quickly reassured the author. Amy had been found, Joyce told her employer, adding that they would fill in the details en route. While Barry made a quick telephone call, she ran upstairs to change into a dress.

In view of what they had seen at Serenity Gardens, the result of the telephone call was almost an anticlimax. But, as Barry remarked, it added a little more sand to the cement of their case. The land on which Giles Stevenson kept his airplane was registered in the name of the Serenity Gardens Nursing Home.

Chief Mullins was a brawny, red-haired man who, out of uniform, might easily have been taken for a lumberjack. He and Miss Penrose were old friends.

After an exchange of pleasantries he inquired as to the purpose of their visit, and it was at this point that the friendship took a turn for the worse.

"Do you mean to sit there, Millie Penrose, and tell me you actually believe this fairy tale?" he demanded. "Why, it's the silliest bit of malarkey I've heard in all my days on the force! Those people up at the nursing home could have the whole kit and caboodle of you in jail for slander. I'd have to throw the key away!"

"But we're telling the truth!" Joyce cried. "Both Barry and I *saw* Amy!"

"Did you, now? You know her well, I suppose, to be so quickly identifying her?"

"No, but we know what she looks like. Elizabeth told us. And there was the book she marked up—that came from Serenity Gardens. Miss Fisher, the librarian, will tell you that!" she declared heatedly.

"Then why didn't she write an appeal for help in the book while she was at it?" His tone was not unkind, but it was evident that Chief Mullins thought the girl craved excitement and had convinced both Miss Penrose and Barry Randolph that a crime had taken place when actually nothing of the sort was true.

"There was the fire," Miss Penrose took up the battle. "We've shown you the gasoline can and the strip of adhesive from the window."

"And I'd just like to know why you didn't bother to notify me before," the officer said truculently. "Just because you write books about criminals, Millie, doesn't mean you're qualified to solve real cases

yourself. And speaking of books," he went on, "how do you expect me to believe somebody tried to burn your house down to destroy an incriminating manuscript when you can't even find the incriminating part yourself? You—who wrote the thing!"

"I know it sounds queer, Timothy, but it fits so neatly. I mean it would if we knew the reason behind all these strange happenings," Miss Penrose amended. "And after Amy called last night—"

"You didn't speak with her yourself, I suppose?" the Chief inquired.

"No, but Joyce gave me the message." Seeing his expression of doubt, she burst out, "I won't have my secretary maligned! If Joyce says Amy called, then Amy did call."

"There now, Millie," he said placatingly. "Don't get your dander up. Tell you what I'll do: I'll send one of my patrolmen over to the hangar to talk to this Stevenson fellow. Could be he's a wrong 'un. But I don't believe for one minute that the folks up at the nursing home have kidnaped Miss—" He consulted his notes. "—Miss Dekker. You haven't, I presume, received a ransom note that you've been keeping under your pillow?"

"No," Miss Penrose said. "I thought she had eloped, you see, so I wasn't really worried until—"

"Until your new secretary decided that Pirate's Cove was too tame and decided to liven things up a bit?"

Barry placed a restraining hand over Joyce's arm, and imitated the Chief's sarcastic tone. "Could it be that you've recalled how much the nursing home

pays in taxes every year?" he asked. "Is that why you're willing to absolve them without even checking into the matter?"

Chief Mullins began to bluster. Then, surprisingly, he emitted a sheepish chuckle. "Could be," he admitted. "We can't afford to antagonize innocent taxpayers. If they're guilty of something, that's different. Then I wouldn't care if they supplied Fort Knox from their W-2 forms." He turned to Joyce and gave her an appraising look. "Miss Farrell, if I've made a mistake, I do apologize. You look like a levelheaded young woman. But I've had experience with young girls who've found time heavy on their hands. You'd be amazed at some of the pranks they think up."

"Timothy, are you going to do anything about this or not?" Miss Penrose interrupted.

"Of course I am," he averred. "I told you I'd have the pilot checked out. I'll get a line on this Dr. Van der Lys, too, and let you know the minute I hear anything. Does that satisfy you?"

"I suppose it will have to," she sighed. "In the meantime—"

He snorted. "In the meantime you can go home and write another book. And try not to make the policemen sound so stupid in your next one!"

They filed out silently, deflated and unhappy.

Chief Mullins shook his head, muttering that they had presented him with a pretty kettle of fish. He reached to flick on his intercom box, but checked the motion and instead picked up the sheaf of papers on his desk. It was headed, *"Witch's Wind,*

Chapter 1," and had been left there by Millicent Penrose. He read with absorbed interest for a few minutes, and gradually a frown creased itself between his heavy eyebrows. The manuscript lay discarded on the desk while he stared at the ceiling.

"I wonder," he said, and reached for his notes of the recent interview. There was only one word in the entire batch of notes which he sought, and when he had found it and harked back through the long corridor of memory, he was propelled into action.

"Max," he barked into the intercom set. "Get long-distance on the phone. I want to talk to the Civil Aeronautics people in the city. And make it fast!"

Could they have witnessed the scene which had just taken place in the Chief's office, the homeward bound trio would have been considerably heartened. As it was, however, they were all convinced that the officer meant to make no more than a cursory investigation of the matter.

While Barry tried to restore Joyce's below-zero feelings with a vintage collection of jokes and puns, Miss Penrose sat mutely in the back seat, drumming her fingers against the armrest. She did not so much as open her mouth during the journey, but her brain was busily fomenting a plan, for when Barry had brought the car to a halt in front of the house, she motioned the young people to wait.

"Who," she asked, "has the most forceful personality in Pirate's Cove?"

"That's easy," Barry said promptly. "My Aunt Luella."

"I think so too," Miss Penrose agreed. "It's fortunate that this is her year to be president of the Cultural Society."

They stared at her in perplexity, wondering what on earth the Pirate's Cove Cultural Society had to do with the problem at hand.

"Because I'm afraid," she went on, "that we are going to have to rescue Amy ourselves. And Luella is just the person to open the door for us."

THIRTEEN

"I DON'T get what you're driving at, Miss Penrose," Barry admitted, as baffled as Joyce.

"It's really quite simple," Miss Penrose said. "If Luella thought that those poor, friendless patients at the nursing home were positively starved for entertainment, don't you think she would want to do something about it?"

"Sure. But they aren't, you know. They have everything money can buy," Barry pointed out.

"Oh, I see what you mean!" Joyce cried. "You want Mrs. Norris to arrange for the Cultural Society to put on a program there."

Miss Penrose bobbed her head. "Exactly. The doctor could refuse, of course, but it would make him look awfully churlish, and in any case I think Luella can overrule his objections. She is a most determined woman."

"That's a wonderful idea," Joyce applauded. "Miss Penrose, you're wasting your time writing mystery novels. You should be directing the FBI!"

"I just happened to think of it," Miss Penrose said modestly. "Well, then, it's settled. I'll telephone Luella now and ask her to set it up for tomorrow night. That's short notice, but I'm sure she will be able to arrange it."

"Are we going to tell anybody our real purpose?" Barry asked. "I mean, should Aunt Luella know about Amy?"

"The less anyone knows, the better," Miss Penrose said flatly. "If something should go wrong, I don't want the rest of the Society implicated. I rather think Timothy Mullins would take a dim view of what we have in mind, and he just might decide to arrest us for disturbing the peace or some such nonsensical thing."

"I hope we don't have adjoining cells," Barry joked. "A thirty-day jail sentence might give me time to finish up my thesis; but if you two were next door, I suppose I'd have to listen to your plans for a jail break."

The first raindrops splattered to the ground as they left the station wagon and hurried into the house. Miss Penrose went immediately to the telephone, and even before she had finished dialing, the storm broke in earnest. Joyce and Barry huddled together on the window seat, watching the black sky open and spill clouds of moisture onto the landscape.

Once Luella Norris learned of the funless plight of the patients at Serenity Gardens, she needed no further urging to use her influence on Dr. Van der Lys. The idea should have occurred to them long

ago, she said, and she agreed to call the nursing-home director that very moment. By the time the two ladies said good-bye her enthusiasm had mounted to the point where she was considering setting up an arts and crafts program at Serenity Gardens in which the patients themselves could participate.

"Now to get down to business," Miss Penrose said briskly.

Joyce and Barry gathered around her on the couch, and after much discussion they hit upon a plan which they considered workable. They decided that it would be out of the question for Barry to accompany the rest of the party, and that therefore he was to wait at the side door until Joyce found an opportunity to slip away and admit him. Together they would ascend to the third floor, locate Amy's room, and spirit her away while the doctor and his cohorts were occupied by the program.

"I hope the weather has cleared by then," Joyce said, with a little shudder. "That place strikes me as being decidedly spooky, and a storm wouldn't help matters a bit."

The telephone shrilled, its piercing clamor adding to the din which the blustering wind and rain created just outside the window. Miss Penrose hastened to answer the call. She returned a moment later, looking as elated as if she had just won the Pulitzer Prize.

"It's all set," she declared triumphantly. "Luella said the doctor was against the plan at first, complaining that it might prove to be too much

excitement for his patients, but she battered down his defenses."

"Wonderful!" Joyce cried.

"He might get more excitement than he's bargaining for," Barry predicted. "But I hope it will prove more unsettling to him than to his patients. They looked like a pretty hardy group, anyway the ones we saw. Bet they don't budge out of their chairs for anything but the dinner gong."

Elizabeth interrupted the conference just then, fretfully demanding to know if they intended to sit there starving while the roast burned to a cinder. Barry required only a minimum amount of coaxing to be persuaded to stay for dinner, and during the meal they continued to discuss their plan, trying to anticipate any difficulties which might arise. Around nine o'clock Elwood Norris drove up to take Barry back to town, since the storm had not abated and it would have been risky for him to attempt to bicycle home.

Joyce was certain that she would never get to sleep that night, but surprisingly, it was morning before she knew it. Almost the instant she opened her eyes she bounded out of bed and ran to the window. The sun was making a wan effort to break through the gray sky, and though raindrops still shimmered on the grass and flowers, at least no new clouds appeared to threaten a repeat performance of the previous night's storm.

She ducked in and out of the shower, tossed on the first dress which came to hand, and flew down-

stairs to see if Miss Penrose had concocted any new ideas during the night. She found the writer humming a gay, if off-key, tune, dragging an enormous carton of wastepaper out of the study.

"One of these days I'm going to succumb to the lure of trash baskets," she grunted. "Do you know, it took me a full hour to straighten that room. But it had to be done; the girls will be here at ten for a rehearsal. Do hurry and have your breakfast, dear."

By "girls" Joyce assumed Miss Penrose meant the members of the Pirate's Cove Cultural Society. Despite the lack of advance notice, the ladies turned out in force for the occasion. Luella Norris' enthusiasm for the project proved to be contagious, and soon a dozen women were gathered in the living room spiritedly discussing the order of their program.

"If they only knew!" Joyce couldn't help giggling to herself, and went to help Elizabeth prepare refreshments.

After a busy morning, which had been enlivened by an argument between Zinnia Fisher and Harriet Wilks over the comparative benefits to culture of art and music, the afternoon crept by at a snail's pace. Barry telephoned during his lunch hour to report that Zinnia had left him in charge of the library. He promised to be on the spot that evening, and added whimsically that it had been weeks since he had enjoyed such a peaceful morning.

With everything arranged, Joyce divided her time between worrying about her scheduled activities for the night and reassuring Miss Penrose that

everything would go smoothly. At least once in each half hour she peered anxiously out the window and frowned at the sky, which seemed to be growing increasingly gloomier. By seven o'clock, when Elizabeth clapped on her hat and announced that she was going to the movies, the storm had not yet broken, but the smell of rain hung heavy in the air and an early darkness had fallen like a shroud about the countryside.

"Oh dear, I don't like this one bit!" Miss Penrose groaned. "I thought I could carry it through without having an attack of nerves, but now—"

Joyce finished for her. "I know. My nails are chewed down to the second knuckle." A horn hooted from the driveway. Joyce rushed to put on her raincoat. It was too late to back out now.

The raincoat, she discovered fifteen minutes later, was a very handy item of apparel. Its limp, waterproof hood drooped over her forehead and clung to her cheeks. She was careful to keep her head bent low as she trooped into the entrance hall of Serenity Gardens in the wake of the Cultural Society ladies. Dr. Van der Lys, Iris Hale, and a scattering of nurses had formed a reception committee. Joyce stole a glance at the doctor from beneath her hood, and noted that his expression of welcome was definitely on the frostbitten side. In fact, he looked more like a glowering Halloween pumpkin than a happy host. Mrs. Norris went up a notch in her estimation. She felt sure that nothing but Luella's steamroller tactics could have persuaded him to agree to this intrusion.

The visitors were hustled down a sterile-looking corridor into a large assembly room toward the rear of the building. Joyce tried desperately to keep her bearings as the committee members swarmed alongside her, and she let out a heartfelt sigh when she glimpsed the door which led onto the terrace. Deliberately she choose an end seat at the back of the hall. Now if only the program was interesting enough to hold everyone's attention!

It started out rather badly. Luella Norris gave a short speech and then proceeded to read a sample of her poetry. Stanza after stanza droned endlessly from her lips. However, Harriet Wilks was next on the program, and whatever might be said for her original compositions, she was a highly skilled pianist. The audience began to display more than courteous interest. Joyce chose a moment when all eyes were turned toward the stage and slipped noiselessly through the exit.

"Another night like this, and I'll belong in a nursing home myself," she thought.

She loitered in the corridor for a full minute, trying to quiet her pounding heart and at the same time make sure that no one followed her. Explanations at this stage of the game would be awkward.

Staunchly, Joyce fought back her misgivings and tiptoed down the hall. Her rubber boots made just a whisper of sound against the polished linoleum, but to her ears the footsteps sounded like the stampeding hoofbeats of a buffalo herd. She reached the door, fumbled for a moment with

the bolt, and then eased it open, letting in a blast of cold night air.

"Barry?" Joyce called softly.

Receiving no answer, she thrust her head through the opening and peered into the blackness. Nothing moved but the shadows of trees and bushes swayed by the freshening breeze.

"Barry?" she called again, and this time there was a tremor in her voice. What if he had misunderstood, and was waiting instead at the front door?

When no comforting form materialized after another two or three minutes, she swung the door to and shot the bolt. Something had gone wrong. Not for a second did she consider the possibility that Barry had simply forgotten, or, worse still, that he had decided the rescue team could do without him.

A wave of panic threatened to engulf Joyce. What if—what if Barry had been discovered skulking about the grounds? Something ghastly might have befallen him, and here she stood, wavering in indecision!

With a tremendous effort she managed to get a grip on her rapidly ebbing courage. Worrying about Barry wasn't going to help Amy. On the other hand, once Amy was safely away from this awful place, nobody would dare to harm Barry. The girl would be able to expose the whole setup.

"Joyce Eleanor Farrell," she told herself sternly, "you have just been elected as a delegation of one. Get a move on!"

There might be a rear stairway, but Joyce couldn't be sure what lay in the shadowy regions of the ill-lit

corridor. Besides, to reach it she would need to pass the assembly hall again, and that was much too risky. It would have to be the front route.

Once Joyce had decided on a course of action, she wasted no further time in speculating about Barry's whereabouts. She had caught sight of the broad staircase leading off the entrance hall almost as soon as she had entered the building, and it was here she headed now. A quick glance over her shoulder and up the staircase itself assured her that nobody was about. Presumably, most of Serenity Garden's staff were listening to Zinnia Fisher's lecture on pastels. She could only pray that the talk would hold their fixed attention.

Joyce gained the second floor without incident and hastened up the next flight, hoping that she had not lost her bearings. Of course there might be another wing of the building that she didn't even know existed, but she doubted that this was the case. At any rate, she had little choice but to trust her memory.

The third window from the end—that was where Amy's face had appeared. With a shock, Joyce realized that some of the rooms could have two windows. The third window might not necessarily mean the third room. She wished with all her heart that Barry was beside her.

The problem of the windows solved itself, as things turned out. The first two doors stood slightly ajar. Joyce tried the knob of the third room, and found that the lock resisted her pressure.

"Who—who's there?" a tremulous little voice asked.

"A friend," Joyce answered softly. "Where's the key to this room?"

"There is an office just off the staircase. They usually keep a set there," the voice responded.

Joyce sped back to the head of the stairs and found a good-sized room equipped with a desk and file drawers. She soon spotted a large brass key ring hanging from a hook above the water cooler, and snatching it, she hastened back to the third room.

The first five keys failed to budge the lock. The sixth turned it easily, and a dull click signaled success. Joyce's fingers closed over the knob and opened the door.

A girl, barefooted and dressed in a muslin nightgown, stared at her from the bed. She was tiny and overly thin, and her black braids emphasized the pallor of her complexion.

"Hello," Joyce said. "You *are* Amy Dekker, aren't you?"

FOURTEEN

THE GIRL'S enormous dark eyes widened with apprehension. She shrank back against the bed and clutched the blankets. "I—I don't know you," she choked.

"I am the one you waved to yesterday," Joyce said gently, realizing that she must win the girl's confidence before further progress could be made.

"We were looking for you," Joyce went on. "The fellow with me was Barry Randolph, Mrs. Norris' nephew. My name is Joyce Farrell, and I'm Miss Penrose's secretary. I answered the phone when you called Sunday evening. We've come to help you. Miss Penrose and the rest of the Cultural Society are downstairs now, keeping everyone occupied with a program."

"Yes, I—I'm Amy Dekker," the other girl admitted. The terror gradually faded from her eyes and was now replaced by a spark of hope. "Do you think—can you get me out of here?"

Joyce whipped off her raincoat. "Here. Get into

this," she ordered. "We must hurry. Are you able to walk?"

"Oh yes," Amy said. "They haven't harmed me. They just brought me here and locked me in this room." She looked with distaste around the blank grayish-green walls. "I hate this place!"

"Hush!" Joyce was terrified that the girl would lapse into hysterics. One loud cry could set off an alarm which might endanger both their lives. "Take it easy," she added more gently, now that it appeared as if Amy had managed to control her emotions. "We'll make a dash for the stairway, and—"

"I'm afraid I can't allow you to do that."

Joyce whirled. The corpulent form of Dr. Van der Lys filled the doorway and seemed to overflow into the room. Behind him was the tall beautiful blonde.

"See—I told you they were up to something," Iris Hale exclaimed. "It was insane to allow these women to come here!"

The doctor shrugged. "Some day, my dear niece, perhaps I shall let you do my thinking for me," he sneered. "No harm has been done. We will merely take our departure a day earlier than we had planned. Call Giles. Tell him to be ready for take-off in half an hour."

Somewhat cowed by his sarcasm, Iris left to do his bidding.

Joyce's mind had raced frantically. After the first shock of discovery, her fear had crystallized into fury.

"You'll never get away with this," she informed

the doctor. "Our friends are downstairs. If I don't return within a few minutes they will come looking for me."

"In a few minutes they may look to their hearts' content," Dr. Van der Lys retorted. The familiar phrase sounded strange, thickened by his guttural accent. "Neither you nor we will be here for them to find."

"I'll scream," she threatened, and took a deep breath.

Dr. Van der Lys slipped his hand into his pocket. "That would be most unwise. Most—unwise."

Joyce gulped. She had no doubt that a revolver was leveled at her.

Amy's thin body began to tremble. Sobbing hysterically, she collapsed onto the bed.

"Don't you worry," Joyce soothed her new friend. "He isn't going to hurt us. The police will catch him the minute he steps out the door."

Even this drastic bluff failed to ruffle the doctor's complacency. His great bulk shifted to the window; he twitched aside the shade and peered down into the courtyard. Joyce, who had been hoping for a miracle, knew that he saw nothing which gave him cause for alarm.

"Well, it might have worked," she consoled herself. She continued to pat Amy's back, and by the time Iris returned she had concocted and rejected a dozen plans. Try as she would, she couldn't figure a way out of this deadly predicament.

"I've put the bags in the car," Iris reported, pulling a coat around her shoulders as she entered the

room. "Giles is furious, though. He doesn't think the rain will hold off much longer."

"The weather will improve as we go farther south," the doctor predicted calmly. "Is our other patient asleep?"

"Yes, I gave him a hypodermic injection."

"Good. He was becoming a nuisance." He gestured for Joyce and Amy to precede him through the door.

The girls had no choice but to follow his orders. With cold, trembling fingers Amy clung to Joyce's arm as they shuffled down the hall. It occurred to Joyce that she might make a break and escape, but the instant the thought popped into her head she dismissed it. They would see the situation through together—to the end.

Dr. Van der Lys grunted for them to halt outside the office at the head of the stairs. He kept a cautious eye turned in their direction while he knelt to open a wall safe which was cleverly disguised as a ventilator. Drawing out a bulky manila envelope, he smiled. It was the first time Joyce had seen him do anything but frown or grimace, and she decided that the smile did nothing to improve his appearance.

"Five hundred thousand dollars," he gloated. "Half a million. We should be able to live quite comfortably on that, don't you think?"

"Yes, I've heard that board and room at Alcatraz cost very little," Joyce could not resist remarking.

Iris raised her hand as though she meant to strike the girl, but Dr. Van der Lys snapped a curt order

and they were off again. Once or twice Joyce tried to delay the procession by lagging behind, but each time she was prodded sharply and forced to keep up with Iris' quick steps.

A swinging door gave entrance to a winding, badly lit staircase at the far end of the building. The quartet descended in single file. Joyce had the sinking sensation of one who is trapped in a deep well. Every step she took put her further at the mercy of the unscrupulous man who strode behind her, yet there was nothing she could do to help herself.

Again they were ordered to a halt while Iris made a rapid survey of the grounds. At her low-voiced signal, the girls were shepherded across a patch of lawn and into a waiting car.

Joyce sent a searching glance around the dark terrace. Where was Barry? she asked herself again and again. Somehow she did not think he had been taken prisoner, for if that were the case the doctor surely would have taunted her with the information. But—where was he?

Iris put the car in reverse and sent it spinning over the gavel path. They traveled several hundred feet in this backward manner before she swiveled around and turned onto the road. Only when the car was pointed away from the building did she switch on the headlights.

Amy slumped dejectedly in the front seat. Apparently Dr. Van der Lys considered Joyce the more dangerous of his two captives, for he had ordered her to sit in the back beside him. His hand never strayed more than a few inches away from his

pocket. Joyce edged as far to the opposite side of the seat as she could manage. Despite her determination to remain calm, she was growing more and more terrified. At the rate of speed they were traveling, another ten minutes would bring them to their destination; and she realized that once the party had boarded the plane, her position would be even more dangerous than it was at present.

"Do something, do something, do something," the tires seemed to implore, as they rocketed over the slick pavement.

To shut out this futile advice, and to combat the numbness of terror she felt seeping through her brain, Joyce turned to confront Dr. Van der Lys.

"I'm surprised you haven't been caught long before this," she said. "The nursing home must have a supervisory committee. How did you manage to worm your way into such an important position?"

He chuckled. It was not a happy sound. "I was only the—how do you say—interim director of Serenity Gardens. The permanent official, Dr. Emil Wellington, was an old classmate of mine in Amsterdam. We had not met for many years, but when I heard he was taking a leave of absence because of ill health, I prevailed upon him to recommend me for the position on a temporary basis."

"It's a good thing you had me to set up those phony references for you," Iris flung back over her shoulder.

"Yes, indeed," he said dryly. "What would I do without you, my dear?"

Iris murmured an angry retort, but apparently

she knew better than to provoke her uncle into an open argument. Instead, she turned her wrath on Joyce.

"How did you guess where to find your little pal?" she demanded.

"One of the books you returned to the library tipped me off," Joyce said.

"A book?" Amy quavered, coming to life for the first time since the ride had begun. "But I didn't write a message—they wouldn't trust me with a pencil or even a lipstick."

"No, it was your fingernail doodling. I had seen those marks in another book at the house, and Miss Penrose told me you often made them. I guess Iris didn't realize how dedicated Zinnia Fisher is to those books. She spotted the marks right away."

"Then you have her to blame for your unenviable position," Dr. Van der Lys snapped. "Enough talk. Iris, stay within the speed limit. We do not wish to invite the curiosity of any passing policemen."

A fine mist gathered on the windshield, and thunder rumbled in the distance. Joyce, who had almost given up hope of being rescued, took new courage from these forerunners of the storm. At that point she would have welcomed a hurricane!

But Dr. Van der Lys evidently had no intention of being deterred by a few raindrops. When Iris slackened speed and started to pull up on the shoulder of the road, he barked an order for her to take the car through the meadow.

"After tonight we will have no further use for

this automobile," he said. "Let it carry us as far as it will."

The jouncing ride tossed them about like feathers tumbled by the breeze. At times the car climbed masses of rock and jarred over heavy underbrush; at other times the wheels slithered over marshy bits of lowland and threatened to become mired in the soft earth. Whatever else she might be, Joyce had to concede, Iris was a superb driver. She brought the car neatly to a stop close to the hangar.

Joyce climbed out reluctantly, and promptly sank almost to her ankles in the slushy field still partially awash from the previous night's deluge. Driving rain drenced her to the skin; goose pimples prickled along her arms. She turned to speak a word of encouragement to Amy, and suddenly froze as a brilliant streak of lightning illuminated the sky and glittered on the plane poised at the head of the runway.

"This nightmare can't be real," she found herself thinking, but just at that moment a tall figure emerged from the depths of the hangar and strode into the open.

"What the—" Giles exclaimed upon sighting Joyce. Dr. Van der Lys cut him short with a few crisp words of explanation.

"All right then, we'll have to take her," the pilot conceded. "Two hostages are better than one anyway." He studied the group once more. "Where's Dachrest?"

"Peacefully curled in the arms of Morpheus. The

police won't go home empty-handed," Iris insinuated.

Another streak of lightning flared, showing Giles and Iris huddled close together. Their faces might have been cast from the same mold, and Joyce realized immediately that they must be brother and sister. So that was why Iris had looked so familiar. How stupid she had been not to make the connection before.

Iris climbed lithely into the cockpit and half dragged Amy in beside her. Prodded by Dr. Van der Lys, Joyce had no alternative but to follow suit. Resignedly, she snapped the safety belt about her waist, and even managed a feeble smile at the sight of the fat man being boosted aboard the plane. If they needed ballast, he would certainly provide it!

Queenie's engine was already warmed up. Her gleaming propeller blades slashed through the air, her motor pulsed. Under Giles' sure manipulation, she began creeping down the runway.

Although she could distinguish very little of the dark landscape, Joyce sent a last look out the window, wondering to what alien land she was being transported. Mexico first, almost certainly, and then? Farther south, she guessed, to some Latin American country where wealthy visitors were welcomed with no questions asked.

Preoccupied by these thoughts, she blinked at the twin pinpoints of light jiggling through the blackness. Intrigued, she watched the beams grow larger.

"If I didn't know better, I'd swear that was a car," she murmured under her breath. Suddenly it dawned on her that it was indeed a car bearing down on them. She could make out its shape from the reflected headlight glow, and it looked—

At that exact moment Giles, too, became aware of the vehicle. Grunting out a pungent oath, he sent the plane racing down the marshy field. But the car, too, had increased its speed, and Joyce gasped as she saw it swing into their path.

Giles' knuckles were white as he tried desperately to get *Queenie* into the air. For a moment it seemed that he had succeeded, but a split second later the plane's wheels skidded in the mud. Either the runway had been too short or her load too heavy, for *Queenie* spiraled crazily and then lurched at the automobile in a sickening, out-of-control burst of speed.

Iris' scream ripped like a dagger through the cockpit. "We'll be killed! We'll all be killed!"

FIFTEEN

"You dope!" Barry kept repeating. "You impossible little dope! Whatever possessed you to try such a stunt alone?"

"Well, there wasn't much else I could do," Joyce pointed out. "You didn't show up at the door as we had planned. I was terrified that something might have happened to you."

"Nothing happened to me but Chief Timothy Mullins," Barry growled. "He was pretty sore at first; but once I told him what we were up to, he turned into a regular cyclone. What a chase! I won't forget that ride as long as I live!"

Joyce closed her eyes and clung to him. Just the remembrance of the policeman's heroic efforts to stop the plane was enough to send shivers racing up her spine. The whole ghastly episode was still so vivid, hours later, that she could actually see the terror-stricken faces of her fellow passengers and hear Iris' scream knife through her ears.

Even when it appeared that they must surely

collide with the police car, Giles had continued to battle the controls. *Queenie,* like an enraged bull determined to turn the tables on the matador, had seemed to hurl herself at the flashing red light atop the automobile, and it was only by a superhuman effort that the pilot managed to divert the aircraft's course at the final instant before the impact.

After that, things had taken place too rapidly for clear recollection. Joyce recalled that four policemen with drawn revolvers, followed by an unarmed Barry, had catapulted from the car and rushed the plane. Dr. Van der Lys and his cohorts had surrendered without a fight. Chief Mullins had handcuffed the trio together and left them to trudge the half-mile across the meadow where a radio car was waiting to speed them and their guards to the Ashville jail. He had personally escorted Joyce and Amy home, accompanied, of course, by Barry. Upon their arrival at Pinole Vista they had been besieged by the entire membership of the Pirate's Cove Cultural Society, and thus it was some time before Joyce and Barry found a moment to talk alone.

"I still don't understand what made you decide to call Chief Mullins," she said.

"Decide, nothing. He called me! He got worried when he couldn't raise an answer here, so he tracked me down just as I was leaving for the nursing home," Barry explained. "I swear, that man is a walking lie detector. I tried to put him off, but he wasn't having any, and finally I admitted the whole dark plot." Barry ruefully massaged his ear. "I'm sur-

prised the explosion wasn't heard in Monterey."

"But I thought he didn't believe our story," Joyce interrupted. "What prompted him to change his mind?"

"Oh! Dachrest. The law not only has a long arm; it also possesses a memory like an IBM machine. He read over the notes of the interview and hit on that one word you remembered seeing in the ledger."

"Will you please tell me who Dachrest is?" Joyce implored.

"Just the kingpin of the largest gambling syndicate in America," Barry informed her loftily. "Ex-kingpin, I mean. He was convicted of tax evasion and deported instead of being sent to jail, because he was born in Europe. Well, it seems that he had a hankering to get back into this country, but of course he couldn't just hop on a ship and sail in. So he did the next best thing: he went to South America and then to Panama, hoping eventually to get into Mexico and cross the border from there."

"How does Dr. Van der Lys fit into the picture?"

"Chief Mullins was stumped about that point too, until he learned that the good doctor is Giles Stevenson's uncle. Giles was in the Navy, and Mullins found out that for a time he was stationed in the Canal Zone. The Chief's guess is that Giles hooked up with Dachrest there, and promised to get him back into this country if and when he could. So, when Dr. Van der Lys got himself a job in this neck of the woods, Giles made contact with Dachrest again, had him come as far as Mexico, and ferried him in from there. The Chief checked

with the C.A.A. and learned that Stevenson had made a flight across the border a couple of months back. After that he was able to fit the rest of the story together without much trouble."

"Oh!" Joyce exclaimed. "And that's where *Witch's Wind* came in. Remember, in the first chapter a couple of men entered the country illegally. One of them was careful to keep his face hidden. I just knew there was a connection with that book!"

"Give the little lady a Kewpie doll!" Barry did a creditable imitation of a carnival barker. "Right! Since your boss just read the first chapter of the book at the meeting, Iris jumped to the conclusion that it was going to run along the same lines as their own scheme to bring Dachrest back into this country. I'd bet a hundred to one that she phoned her brother from our house and warned him that the book was a menace to their safety."

"So Giles broke in that night and dumped gasoline all over the manuscript, never suspecting that there was another copy," Joyce finished triumphantly.

A motor droned to a stop in the driveway, and a door slammed. From the window they saw Chief Mullins tramp up the front steps. Joyce sped around to admit the officer and ushered him into the living room, where Amy was being plied with soup and sandwiches by Elizabeth. Miss Penrose hovered nearby, asking questions and at the same time forbidding Amy to say anything until after she had finished eating.

"I ought to have the lot of you locked up!" the Chief roared, the minute he entered the room.

Seeing their startled faces, he relapsed into a grin. "But I won't. As a matter of fact, that entertainment idea was a pretty good plot you cooked up, Millie. Better than some of your books I've read. Next time you get any bright ideas, though, will you please let me know ahead of time? It would save wear and tear on the county's property. I blew out two tires bumping across that field."

"You mean you were right behind us all the time?" Amy squealed.

"Not quite all the time," he admitted, with a wink at Miss Penrose. "Millie saw you pull out of the driveway about the same time we came in the front entrance of Serenity Gardens. We caught up with you on the way out to the hangar, but got hung up on a clump of sagebrush crossing that swamp. It's a wonder we got the car rolling again."

"Lucky for us you did," Joyce exclaimed. "If you hadn't, we might be flying over Guatemala by this time!"

"Did you get a confession out of that gang?" Barry asked eagerly.

"Yes, they admitted everything. Guess that near collision took the spunk out of them, because the pilot didn't even try to deny setting fire to this house." Chief Mullins' broad face cracked into another grin. "There's going to be fireworks at the jail tomorrow morning, I'm afraid, when Anton Dachrest wakes up and finds himself facing another deportation charge. He was still snoring when we locked him in the cell next to the doctor."

"At least that way he can have his plastic surgery looked after," Amy giggled.

Joyce's mouth fell open. "Then Dachrest was the masked man I saw from the air last Sunday! Yesterday, too. And I let Giles convince me that he was just somebody recovering from burns." She thought for a moment. "It must have been Dr. Van der Lys who phoned Giles at the hangar soon after we landed. I'll bet he was furious with him for flying me so low over the grounds that I was able to get a look at the patient. It's a wonder Giles ever took me there. I suppose he felt perfectly safe and did it to show off."

Amy seemed like a different girl now that she was back at Pinole Vista. "The doctor sure was furious," she confirmed. "He wanted Mr. Dachrest to leave right away."

"After spending half a million dollars for a plane ride and a remodeled face, I can see why he was reluctant to go," Barry said.

Chief Mullins turned to Amy. "There are a few things we'd like you to clear up, Miss Dekker. How did you stumble onto the conspiracy in the first place?"

"I met Giles last winter—in February, I think it was," she replied. "He seemed awfully nice, and of course flying with him was thrilling. Until tonight, that is," she added, with a wry grimace. "He told me he was working for the Government on a secret project, and warned me never to mention him or his plane to anyone for fear spies might get wind of it. Stupid me, I believed him! But it was terribly

hard to keep from talking about him. I think that once I did mention to Miss Penrose how easy it would be for foreign agents to land on this coast."

"Why, I believe you did at that," the writer exclaimed. "I wonder if that mightn't have been the remark which started the plot of *Witch's Wind* germinating in my head."

"We got along fine until early in May," Amy went on. "He even gave me a charm bracelet, and I hoped that some day—well, never mind. Anyway, once while he was puttering around outside with *Queenie*, I went into the hangar and found his flight log. He was wild when he caught me reading it. I asked him why he had gone to Mexico and who was this Dachrest man mentioned in the log, and he just stormed at me to mind my own business."

"He probably thought you knew more than you really did," Chief Mullins surmised.

"Yes, I suppose so. When I got his letter I thought he wanted to make up. I met him at the hangar and he said we were eloping, and dictated that note I wrote, asking Miss Penrose to pack my clothes. But as soon as that was finished he brought me to the nursing home and made me stay there. He said they couldn't take a chance on my telling anyone what I knew until they were safely out of the country."

"Did you know who 'they' were?" the policeman queried.

"Not at first. Later I found out that Dr. Van der Lys was Giles' uncle and Iris his sister. She used a different name in case anyone should guess their re-

lationship. I really don't think that the rest of the staff knew anything about me or Mr. Dachrest. Iris always looked after me herself. She told me once that the other nurses thought I was mentally unbalanced."

"Well, your testimony should put the case on ice," Chief Mullins said, rising. "There may be a few more questions I'll want to ask you, but they can wait until tomorrow. Come on, Barry, I'll run you home. It's getting pretty late. I think these four young ladies belong in bed."

Barry cast a beseeching look at Joyce, as if to let her know there were many things he had left unsaid, and before following the officer out the door he promised to call her the next day.

Despite the fact that midnight had long since passed, no one was particularly sleepy. Elizabeth made a pot of cocoa, and the foursome settled cozily around the kitchen table.

Joyce was suddenly reminded of a question still left unanswered.

"How were you able to telephone us Sunday evening?" she asked.

"The doctor was having a big scene with Giles about you." Amy smiled. "It had been going on for hours. Iris came into my room for a moment, but she was so anxious to get back to the office she left my door unlocked. There were people down in the entrance hall. I knew they would never allow me to leave—as I said, they thought I was some sort of maniac who had to be kept locked up—so I did the next best thing and called you. Unfortunately,

Iris happened to pick up the extension phone and overheard us talking. That was the first and only time I ever got out of that room without a guard."

"You poor little thing!" Elizabeth commiserated.

"Oh, let's forget about it," Amy insisted. "Maybe I should consider myself lucky. That will probably be the one big adventure of my life. As soon as I get my things back I'll find another place to stay. I realize I'm imposing on you, and since you have a new secretary now—"

"You'll do no such thing!" Miss Penrose declared. "The very idea!"

"Goodness, I'm going back to school in September anyway," Joyce put in. "I wouldn't dream of taking your job."

The writer held up her hand in an appeal for silence.

"I have the perfect solution," she announced. "Joyce will stay on as my regular secretary until her college term starts, and when you're fully recovered, Amy, you can be my social secretary. There!"

"S-social secretary?" Amy repeated doubtfully.

"Of course. I have a good many social obligations, don't I, Elizabeth? What with the Cultural Society, and—"

Everyone started to laugh at once, but Miss Penrose refused to alter her decision. She had made up her mind to keep both girls, and that was final.

Amy followed Joyce up the stairs when the group had finally decided that it was time for bed.

"I—I still haven't thanked you for all you did,"

she said shyly. "Honestly, I do appreciate your going out on a limb like that for me. I wouldn't have found the courage in a million years!"

"Really, you did me a favor by just being there," Joyce insisted. "I think if I hadn't found you, I'd have gone out of my mind. You're about the only thing I've thought of for weeks." Seeing that the other girl didn't quite understand, she hastened to explain. "You see, Elizabeth and Miss Penrose both talked a lot about you. They said you had eloped and never bothered to get in touch with them again."

"But that was true, as far as they knew. Why did you believe otherwise?"

"Oh, there were a lot of reasons. Mostly, I suppose, because of the wedding present," Joyce laughed. "I mean, the lack of one. It was simply impossible for me to understand why you hadn't forwarded your new address to Miss Penrose when you must have known she'd have a gift for you. I have yet to meet a new bride who would go out of her way to avoid receiving a wedding present!"

SIXTEEN

"HEAVENS!" Miss Penrose exclaimed, a few days following Amy's return to Pinole Vista. "Do you know, girls, I haven't done a scrap of work on my book in almost a week? And the deadline is ten days off!"

"Then let's get busy," Joyce said practically. "I'm sure your social secretary won't mind helping out if we find ourselves in too much of a rush."

Amy giggled; this had become a standing joke between them.

Fortunately, *Witch's Wind* lacked only the two final chapters. While Miss Penrose ran upstairs to collect her notes, Joyce and Amy set to work sharpening a mountain of pencils. Without the writer's knowledge, they carried in a wastepaper basket and placed it alongside her desk.

"This is an 'experiment perilous' if I ever saw one," Amy whispered as they stood outside the study door and struggled to control their mirth.

But a few minutes later they caught the unmis-

takable sound of a wadded-up sheet of paper plopping into the metal basket. They tiptoed away. When Miss Penrose emerged from the study with a filled notebook to be transcribed, she had a rather amused expression on her face, but not once did she mention the fact that her workroom now contained a new piece of equipment.

Joyce was kept busy typing up changes in the manuscript, and consequently she did not see as much of Barry as she would have liked. However, the day after the final draft of *Witch's Wind* had been dispatched to New York he bicycled up to Pinole Vista, looking as pleased as if he had inherited a million dollars.

"Hi! How are Clinton and Howe getting along?" Joyce greeted him.

"Clinton and Howe just won me an instructorship at Stanford University," Barry blurted out the good news.

"Oh, Barry, how wonderful! Why, that means I'll be able to see you on campus."

"I hope to be seeing quite a lot of my fiancée," Barry said, and suddenly halted in confusion. "You will marry me, won't you, darling?"

In her high-school days Joyce had always pictured herself being proposed to in the moonlight, with a background orchestra playing some dreamy tune, and the object of her affections holding her close and proffering a diamond ring. But now that the time had arrived, she wouldn't have cared if Barry had proposed in the middle of a hailstorm. It was just as romantic!

"Oh yes!" was the only answer she could manage before he took her in his arms.

Toward the end of August, Chief Timothy Mullins paid another of his frequent visits to Pinole Vista. "I'm sure you'll be glad to know that Dr. Van der Lys and his accomplices will go on trial next week," he informed them. "The federal men have already taken care of Anton Dachrest's deportation. They've got pictures of his new face on file in Washington, too, so the plastic surgery didn't do him a bit of good."

"I've often wondered whatever happened to the letter I lost that day I went flying with Giles," Joyce mused. "I was so worried he'd find it and realize we were looking for Amy."

"Is this the one you mean?" Chief Mullins asked, drawing a folded sheet of notepaper from his tunic. Joyce quickly identified it. "One of my boys found it on the floor of the hangar. It had fallen behind a portable refrigeration unit."

"The cooler," she remembered. "I guess the letter dropped out of my purse when I leaned over to put away the Coke bottle. Thanks for relieving my mind."

"Any time," he chuckled.

Joyce returned his smile. She and Chief Mullins had become good friends since the night of Amy's rescue. The brawny policeman had won her everlasting respect by his heroic actions, and had further cemented their friendship by offering her a complete apology for his original sarcastic remarks. He

even invited her, teasingly, to join the Ashville police force.

Joyce planned to leave Pirate's Cove on September 10. As she went about her packing, she kept pausing to look around her room, and more than once the suitcases lay neglected while she stood on the balcony admiring the beauty of the gardens beneath her window.

"I'm certainly going to miss this place," she sighed aloud.

The single flaw in her last days at Pinole Vista was the secretive attitude of the rest of the household. If she wandered into a room unannounced, she would invariably surprise Amy, Miss Penrose, and Elizabeth with their heads together; and usually upon her entrance they would spring apart and begin talking loudly and vaguely on three different subjects. Even Lee had a share in whatever it was they were planning, and Joyce had to struggle with herself to avoid feeling hurt.

On September 9, however, everything was explained. Barry drove up to take her to dinner at his aunt's house. It seemed to her that he found a remarkable number of excuses to postpone their arrival. When she walked into the house and found all of her friends gathered for a shower in her honor, she understood why.

For hours, it seemed, Joyce opened presents and exclaimed over one beautiful gift after another. The shower was followed by a buffet dinner. When the dishes were cleared away, Luella Norris

mounted the rostrum and announced that the Cultural Society had planned a special program to celebrate the occasion.

"Am I never to have you to myself?" Barry murmured.

"We have plenty of time," Joyce assured him smilingly. "After I graduate next June, we'll be spending the rest of our lives together."

"With you around the house to distract me, I bet it will be years before I get around to starting my dissertation," Barry grinned.

"And now," Mrs. Norris announced, "a poem!"

Unfortunately, Joyce and Barry weren't listening.

Joyce Farrell is thrilled at the chance to work for the famous Miss Penrose. But she can't help wondering . . . why did her former secretary leave so suddenly, without giving notice? Why did she leave her clothes behind? What do those strange markings in the library book mean? What happened to Amy?

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